

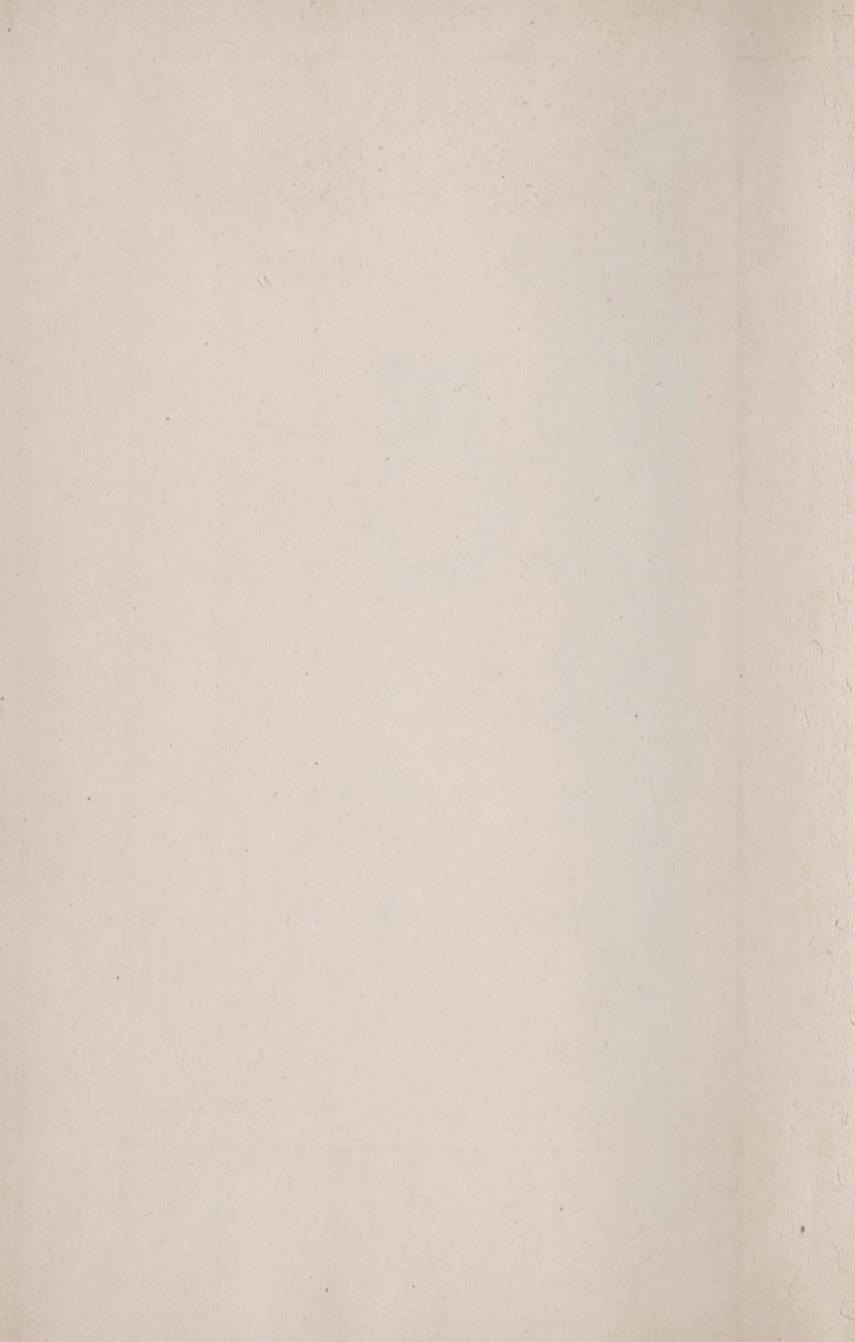


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BY
NINA MILLS ELLIOTT



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CHAPTER ONE

FLORA'S wedding was the one topic of conversation in her set; how she had gone to the little western town to visit her dear friend, Kate West, and after two months spent in one round of pleasure, she had come home the promised wife of Tom West, Kate's brother.

Judge Gray was much opposed to his only daughter going so far from him, but Flora had always ruled since her mother's death. She won her father's consent. When Tom came for a visit to them, the Judge smiled, saying to himself, "I guess the girl has chosen well."

Tom talked over his business affairs with the Judge. No young couple ever embarked on life's sea with fairer prospects. When Tom bade Flora good-bye it was settled that the wedding would be in three months. Kate

was to come and spend the last month in New York with Flora.

"Oh, Tom, what glorious times Kate will have. You must come one week before the wedding."

As these two stood in the parlour of the Gray home, no handsomer couple could be found. Tom, tall and handsome; Flora, a diminutive blond. It was seen at a glance she was the petted child of fortune.

"Yes, my darling, I will be here one week with you, and who knows but I may come sooner? I can't bear to give you up even for three months. How I wish you were going with me this morning, Flora dear. I wonder how I lived at all without you. I know now what it was I was waiting for. Kate has so often been vexed that I could not fall in love with her girl friends. None of them ever interested me until you came, sweet Flora. I knew the moment my hand held yours in welcome, there was something different in you from the rest. Day after day I watched you in our home. I listened for your voice. If I were tired, it soothed me. As the end of your visit drew near I felt I could not live

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without Flora. For days I was miserable, fearing to tell you how dear you were to me. There were so many who worshipped at your shrine. Then, dear heart, I feared to ask you to come to live in my far western home. Flora dear, will you be happy there, far away from all the big city offers you? Will you grow tired of our unpretentious people? Will you be happy with us?"

"Why, Tom, what makes you talk like that? You know I would give up the whole world for you. Like Ruth in the Bible,

'your people shall be my people.'"

Throwing both arms about him, Flora kissed him many times saying, "We will be so happy, dear, that all the world will envy us. Don't let thoughts like that come into your head any more. Write me a long letter each day, no matter how busy you are. Know that I am waiting for a message from the dearest sweetheart a girl ever had. I will write to you each night, telling you how my day has been spent. I wish father would consent to a quiet home wedding, but he says we must be married in the church where he and mother made their vows twenty-two years ago,

and by the same old minister. When Flora Russell, twenty-two years ago, married Walter Gray, it was a great social event; so must be the marriage of their only daughter to Tom West, who comes many miles to claim his bride."

"Bless you, my own little sweetheart! You make me the happiest man in all the world. The hour has come for me to say good-bye. Remember me every moment, and know that away out west I am toiling for Flora."

After many kisses and promises of love eternal, Tom strained her to his breast, and ere she knew he was out the door, fairly flying down the walk.

"Dear old Tom, how I love him. We shall be so happy. Bless you, Tom, I love you with my whole heart and soul. You shall never be sorry that you chose me to be your wife. I will show you that I can keep house with one servant, help with the preserving and do many things that I noticed Kate and her aunt doing while I visited in Salem."

Seating herself in a big comfortable chair, Flora began planning the wedding and her trousseau. After an hour spent quietly she

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spoke aloud. "Flora Gray, what are you thinking of? You are not marrying a New York millionaire. You are not going to dine at Sherry's and lunch at Delmonico's, and have theatre parties with supper after. You are not marrying a man twice your years for money and position who will want you dressed like a doll to show you to his friends and enemies as one of his possessions. You will be a foolish girl to go to live in Salem with the kind of clothes you are planning, so now you must begin all over again. With the exception of my wedding gown and the travelling costume, I will have pretty, simple frocks. I am going to show Tom and Kate that I am one of them. I often felt when I was a visitor in Salem that I would love to have a simpler wardrobe. Now for a dainty trousseau befitting the bride of Tom West, who is working hard to earn honest dollars and fame in his chosen profession. Tom dear, Flora will help you to climb to the top of the ladder, and when we are old you can say, like father, 'Flora helped me; she was my inspiration, my own little leader-on."

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MAS there ever such a beautiful bride, so handsome a groom? How happy they looked! The old church was filled with friends of the Gray family. There was none who stood higher in the state than Judge Gray. He was a descendant of the old family of Grays in Delaware. His father came to New York in the early forties, so Walter Gray was born and reared there. Just twenty-two years ago on the day that his daughter Flora was married he had led Flora Russell, one of the belles of her day, up to the same altar. Now, as the same old wedding march pealed out, and he with his silver hair brushed carelessly back, his face white with sad memories, walked slowly up the aisle, his beautiful daughter on his arm, his heart was heavy indeed. Tom West, waiting at the altar to receive this priceless jewel, felt a thrill of joy never known before as he saw this vision of beauty coming to him, and knew she was

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so soon to take the vows that made her his "until death do us part."

When the venerable priest asked, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" Judge Gray gave one look at his child, then answered in a clear voice, "I do." Handing her over to Tom, he stepped back a few steps, standing through the ceremony.

The last words of the benediction, the solemn peals of the monster organ as the bridal party marched out, all necks were craned to get a glimpse of the bride and groom. There were many there who had seen her mother the day she was a bride. Of course the two weddings were freely discussed.

Driving to her home, a reception of her friends lasted for two hours. Stealing away from the crowd, she went to her own room and changed her beautiful wedding gown for a simple dress of brown, with hat, gloves and shoes the same. She seemed a beautiful child ready to start on her way to school. Tom and her father met her in the upstairs sitting-room. Going down the back stairs to a side street, where a carriage waited for

them, they were driven to the station and boarded the train that would take them home.

Judge Gray could not keep the tears back. He held his child in his arms, bidding her good-bye and asking God to bless and take care of her in her new home. As the two men clasped hands no word was uttered. Flora followed her father to the platform, saying, "You promised you would come in the summer. Don't disappoint me. Good-bye, my good, sweet old dad. Don't miss me too much."

The train was moving. She stood and watched him out of sight, and when she turned to enter the door, Tom was standing by her side. As they closed the stateroom door, he said, "My own little wife, I will try to make up for all you have given up for me. If I fail to make you happy you must tell me, so I can try all over again."

"I have no fear, we will be happy."

The train was fairly flying through the country. They sat hand in hand, discussing all their plans.

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"We are to stop a few days in Chicago so that Kate will get home before we do. Dear old Kate! How she loves New York. What times we had doing the sights. She couldn't understand how I could give it all up and go west to live. I am afraid if you had heard what I told her you would have a case of big head, so I won't tell you; but anyway, I love New York, but I love Tom West better than all the world. We will never give a sigh of regret, only wish for father. I know he will miss me more than he thinks."

"Listen, Flora dear. Our west is a great country. There is room for all who wish to throw in their lot with ours, so in time the Judge may come to live with us. The plans for our new home are about completed. There is a room for your father. Remember our home is his home whenever he feels that he can leave New York."

Clapping her hands in delight at the prospect of her father's coming west to live, Flora was the picture of happiness. After twenty-four hours on the train, Chicago was reached. The wind was blowing a regular gale, cold

and dreary the city looked as they stepped off the train at the Dearborn Street station. Going at once to the Auditorium Hotel they were assigned an apartment. Their baggage was brought up, and Flora changed her travelling dress for one more suitable for dinner in a fashionable café. Many admiring glances followed the handsome couple as they walked through the café to the table at the far end of the room.

They were seated and their order given, when Tom was slapped on the back by a great big fellow in brown clothes.

"Bless my soul! If I am not dreaming, this is Tom West of Salem, Indiana. I haven't seen you for ten years, but you haven't changed a whit."

As soon as Tom could get in a word he introduced his wife to his old roommate at college, Larry Lord.

"Zounds! I didn't know you were a family man. Hadn't heard that you were a benedict. Thought the young lady here might be that kid sister, Kate, that used to write such 'touching' letters to you whenever a pet cat died, or some one killed one of her dogs.

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Come, tell me how long you have been married, and all about yourself in general."

Drawing a chair out he took a seat with them. Flora, covered with blushes at being discovered (all brides delight in hiding the fact), entered into the conversation with a jolly zest that pleased Tom beyond words. He showed how proud he was of his beautiful wife. He could see that Larry was admiring his choice.

"What have you two planned for the evening? I insist that you put yourselves in my hands. I will try to show you some of the charms of the only Chicago. You see, Tom, old boy, I have had my shingle hanging out here for the past five years, and things have come my way pretty lively. I am now sitting on the shady side of Easy Street. No place like old Chicago. You better come here and start life with your beautiful young wife to aid. There is no telling what you might do."

"Oh, thanks awfully, old friend, but I am doing well in Salem. The old town is looking up a bit. I have a romantic idea of fulfilling all the hopes my father and mother

had for me. You know I have gone in for politics. My friends assure me that I will be their next mayor, and I will try to make them proud of doing me the honour. Step by step, I will try to reach the top."

So Flora heard her husband give utterance to his ambition. Little did he think how she could aid him. In her own mind she was vowing allegiance to his political ambition, wondering how she could help him.

The week went quickly. Larry proved himself a prince of good fellows. He was proud to introduce his old friend and his bride into the most exclusive set. Flora was admired beyond words, and men were always in her train. She knew just what to say to flatter their vanity. She knew just how much wine to sip. In fact, she was already beginning to be a politician's wife. She must be agreeable to all, partial to none. Was there ever a young head filled with so much that was to be done? At night when she slept she dreamed ambitious dreams. Her whole soul was fed on ambition. Tom, in his quiet way, showed his love for her in all things. He little dreamed of the castles Flora built.

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The day for leaving Chicago had come. Larry was giving them a dinner at his club. He was regretting to say good-bye to his friends. This week was one of unalloyed happiness. He looked at the wife of his friend, wondering why he could not be as fortunate. He had money, position, everything to offer, but had not yet found a woman that suited him half so well. When the dinner was over, Tom turned to Larry, saying, "Now, old pal, come to see us in our home. We will show you then what life in a small town means."

"Yes," Flora joined in, "Mr. Lord, we will look forward to your visit with great pleasure. I can promise you a good time. Kate knows how to make one enjoy every minute. You may do as I did on my visit, make up your mind to call it home. I was not long in Salem before I had a longing in my heart that Tom only could quiet. So here I am on my way back there to live and be happy."

"I will tell you one thing, Mrs. West. If you will find some one there who will be as proud of me as you are of Tom, I will do

my best to win their consent to live in Chicago."

Shaking hands and promising visits, Tom and Flora were soon steaming away towards home.

"What a jolly good fellow Mr. Lord is! I like him. He is a true westerner, so whole-souled."

"Yes, Larry is a genuine friend. Many a college chap has known his helping hand. He was one of the fortunate few, always had plenty of money to spend as he pleased. I am so glad he liked you, Flora. I must tell you how proud I was of my beautiful wife. Some day, dear, I shall be a rich man and my little Flora shall indulge all her extravagant fancies."

"Tom dear, you know I have always had free access to father's bank account. You must tell me just what our circumstances are. I must know. I want to live within your means. Folks must not say I am spending more than you are able to allow. So many women get the blame for unpaid bills, when they are unaware of the fact. We must be honest with each other, and you

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must tell me what I am to have, be it little or much."

Who would have dreamed that this petted child of a doting father would think of the serious side of life? But she had begun as she wanted to go through life, trying to be a help to the man she loved.

"Now, little girl, you must not worry your head with business matters. We will get along nicely. I have a good law practice, some real estate, and a snug sum of cash in bank. I am not a poor man, neither am I rich, as wealth is counted in New York, but in Salem I am counted a rich man, and we will have no trouble keeping the wolf from the door. You must do as you please. I trust you implicitly."

By the time Salem was reached Tom and Flora were perfectly agreed on how they would live. When the train steamed into the little depot, Kate, with a crowd of friends, was waiting to welcome them home.

"Oh, dear, we thought you would never get here," Kate exclaimed. Flora was hugged and kissed by the girls, the men were profuse

in their welcome.

"I tell you the bride and groom will have to get used to doing social stunts," Kate said, "for I never heard of so many card parties, receptions and even dances, all in your honour. Now, Mr. Tom West, you will find out what it means to have the prettiest wife in town, the women all enjoying her clothes, and the men worshipping her beauty.

"Just think, Flora dear, you and I have to smile at all the men in town, young and old, dance with good, bad and indifferent. You know Tom is running for mayor. I might as well tell you right now you must begin to count votes."

"Why, I went horseback riding with that cross-eyed Ben Thomas, just because he controls more votes in his ward than all the others put together. And think of it! he has sent me flowers every day since, and I am booked for the church festival with him Wednesday night."

"Flora, you may be sorry you got into this political family yet."

"Oh, no I won't. I like it. You just watch me. I will get many votes for Tom, you see if I don't."

CHAPTER THREE

OM WEST was elected mayor by an overwhelming majority, the biggest victory a Democratic candidate had ever known. Many old gossips drank tea and discussed the election with knowing looks and raised eyebrows, in insinuating tones exclaiming, "Well! the men can't resist that city wife of his. You know men are men the world over."

"'They say' she just got out and asked men to vote for Tom, and those who were kinder on the fence promised. You know she dances, plays cards and believes that women should do anything they please."

"Oh, men like to be with women that can keep pace with them, but when their own wives begin they soon call a halt. How can you ever imagine Tom West with a high and lofty city wife?"

"Well, 'they say' she is the ruler. Poor Tom. And him always such a good plain man. Did you know he and Kate both go to the Episcopal Church now?"

So poor Flora already was beginning to have thrusts that she would feel later. How little she dreamed of the construction Salem women were putting on her treatment of Tom's friends. Her Tom, whose ambitions she adored. There was nothing she wouldn't do to help him. He seemed so pleased when his friends admired his wife. How she studied the political questions of the day, so that she could talk intelligently on all that interested him.

Their home was soon the rendezvous for the politicians and learned men who came that way. Tom was growing in favour with all. Already there was a current of influence toward his nomination for Governor.

Living in Salem was a man of vast wealth and influence, with an exalted place among his townsmen. Somehow he had felt that Tom West stood in his way. He too coveted the Governor's chair, and now more than ever since he saw that Tom West had friends who were beginning to talk quietly for him.

Daniel Lane sat in his luxurious office thinking how to deal the blow that would turn the people to him.

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"God! He has the only woman I could ever love for his wife, and to walk off with this office! I will balk him if I lose my future. Think how that little dimpled wife of his repulses me. She is a shrewd one. While I talked to her, all looking on thought she was pleased with my attention, and she was giving me the devil for squeezing her hand at every opportunity. I told her that I would yet hold her in my arms and have all the kisses I craved. Didn't her eyes flash! I will win that woman from Tom West or my name is not Dan Lane. My best card will be not to come out as his political opponent. I must lay low. I must see her often, above all I must be invited to his home. Ye gods! I will gain favour in her sight, in two years I will have her at my feet begging for mercy. She has said things to me no woman ever dared to say, and she shall pay me well for her insolence."

Dan Lane's train of thought was interrupted by the entrance of the rector of his church, who smiled on Mr. Lane with his beaming countenance. Dan always headed the

charity funds, and his name was used in all mission and church work.

"Good-morning, Mr. Black, glad to see you. Take a chair. How are Mrs. Black and the boys?"

"Quite well, quite well, thank you, Mr. Lane. Just thought I would drop in and chat with you a few moments if you were at leisure. I am so much encouraged in my church work. I had the first meeting of my confirmation class last night. Now whom do you think was there? I couldn't go by without telling you. Tom West and his sister Kate. I feel this is the work of Tom's wife; a wonderful little woman, she is. She is always up and doing. Somehow everything seems to have taken on new life. She is always in her place at church. Her Sundayschool class is the banner class. I wonder more women don't use their influence for good. Tom West is a lucky man. Lane, what do you think of the talk going around about Tom for the next governor?"

Striving to hide the look of annoyance he knew was on his face, he remarked, "Well, I think West would make a fine governor.

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He is of the people, and for the people, and there never breathed a truer Democrat."

"Well, Mr. Lane, I am glad to hear you come out so straight for West. I heard a gentleman say to-day with your influence that we could send Tom West to Indianapolis two years from now."

Getting up, he held his hand out to Dan Lane saying, "Mr. Lane, you must come out to service Sunday, and Mrs. Black wants you to come in for tea this afternoon. West and his wife will be stopping in."

"Thank you kindly, and tell Mrs. Black her invitations always come at the right time. If there is anything I do enjoy it is a cup of Mrs. Black's tea."

"Good-day, sir, I will see you then this afternoon about five."

Closing the door Mr. Black disappeared down the street. Dan Lane lighted his cigar, and took a few puffs.

"It beats hell how the mention of that woman's name thrills me. I must be careful not to let this community know how I hate Tom and what a d—— fool I am about his wife. Two years is a long time to wait, but

step by step I will work until she shall be mine, the little vixen. I will feed her on her husband's ambition. She knows what I can do, and ye gods! she shall feel what I will do."

CHAPTER FOUR

ERE many days went by, Dan Lane was the constant companion and trusted friend of Tom West. They were seen together day after day, and West was now confidential advisor and counsel for Lane, the wealthiest man in that section of the country. Lane was a frequent visitor in the West home. Kate West had gone abroad with some friends to spend a year, so Flora found she had to entertain her husband's friends without his lively sister. As Tom was putting on his overcoat with Flora's help, he said to her, "You must look your very best to-night, dear. Lane and his friend Burns are coming to dinner with us. You know Burns is our congressman. I don't know what I would do without my 'political partner.' That's what you are, Flora. It seems to me you always know how to make things right. You have won over some of those who were most opposed to me."

"Oh, Tom dear, am I indeed a help? I do want to be. I am as anxious as you are for the people to vote you into their highest seat of honour."

As he kissed her good-bye the postman's ring sounded long and loud.

"Wait, dear, just one minute; I know I must have a line from father." Hanging to the door she took the letters, glancing over them quickly. "No, none from New York; but Tom, here is a great big fat one from Chicago; I think it must be from that dear fellow, Larry Lord."

Tom tore the envelope and read quickly:

"Tom, old boy, I expect to be in Salem Wednesday, on my way to Indianapolis. Big deal in sight. Make your plans so I can have you to myself. Think I have something under my hat that you may see fit to go in. At any rate will give you the chance to get rich quick. Best regards to your beautiful wife. I hope she has not ceased to call me friend. Good-bye until Wednesday, 2 P.M.

"Yours, "LARRY LORD."

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"Well! That is good news. We will be more than happy to have Larry with us. I am sure my little Flora can make our welcome all he would have it. Good-bye again, dear, I am a little late. Lane always excuses me, says if you were his wife he would give up business and stay with you, or take you around with him to make his friends envy him. Funny fellow, Dan. So long, I will be at home near five."

Flora watched her husband board the car. Why was it she could not tell her husband not to trust Dan Lane? Why was she compelled to entertain him? She knew what he was, but would it ruin Tom's career if she complained? Was Dan Lane sincere in his professions of friendship for Tom? How could he say the things to her he did if he was really loyal? What was it Dan Lane held over her head? She felt in his presence that something terrible was about to happen. Whenever she was alone with him he assumed such a confidential attitude. Once he even kissed her bare neck as they were passing through a dark hall, leaving the conservatory. When she remonstrated with him

he seemed to feel so sorry that he had offended her. He now called her "Flora" when talking to her alone. As her thoughts flew over the past few months, she could see so many things that she knew in her own heart were not what they should be, yet she knew an open rupture between Tom West and Dan Lane meant defeat for Tom. At last she walked into the library, gazing into the flames. She spoke aloud:

"Now, it will be game for game. I will play your game, Dan Lane, for everything there is in it. I will never be the cause of my husband losing in this race. I know this is a dangerous game I am playing, but Tom dealt me the cards, and I shall play them with a clear head. From now on it is a woman against Dan Lane. He has ruled the people for years, he shall support my husband in this fight. Last night he told me that the man who was thinking of running against Tom had been his bosom friend for years, a man of his own age, a smart man, and one who had held offices of trust. That every day friends were trying to get him to come to his support. Can I ever forget how

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he looked when he said in his low, insinuating way, 'But you know, Flora, you can always count on me.' Oh, the horrors of it! Why can't a man be a man, come out for or against a man, declare his principles, stand for what he believes to be right, and vote for the man he knows would best serve the people? Why must some selfish or fiendish motive control their influence?"

As Flora left the room she seemed older, more determined in some task she had to perform. All day she busied herself with household duties. She thought often of Larry, and was sorry that Kate could not be here to enjoy his visit.

"Oh, how I miss dear Kate, but her letters are so full of what she is doing and seeing that I should be glad she is having such a glorious trip. Oh, how I do need her, bless her! She is older and wiser than I."

When the clock pointed to five, Flora surveyed herself in the glass before going down to meet her husband and his two friends. What she saw was pleasing to her. The blond hair piled high on her head was a crown of gold. Her cheeks were rosy and her eyes

bright. She was dressed in a becoming gown of light blue cloth that fitted the exquisite figure like a glove. As she heard the voices in the hall, with one last glance she held her head aloft and said, "Now, Flora West, this hour you are the wife of Tom West, politician. You are in the game to win. Play your cards well." Going down she found her husband and Dan Lane comfortably seated and discussing some interesting question, as they did not seem to see her enter. Standing in front of her father's portrait was a tall, greybearded man. His side face was turned to her, but she knew she had seen that man before. Where was it? All three noticed her presence at once. Tom hurried to her, saying, "Flora, I want you to meet one of your father's old friends, Judge Burns, of Indianapolis. He was one of your father's boyhood and college friends. When he accepted my invitation, to dine, he was not aware that this happy surprise awaited him."

Giving both her hands to the old gentleman, she made him feel that he was not only a welcome but an honoured guest. After shaking hands with Mr. Lane, Flora devoted

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her entire time to Judge Burns, who seemed much interested in the accounts she gave of her father and his life. Flora grew eloquent when speaking of that home she loved, and sometimes longed for.

"Oh, yes, we are looking for father this summer, to make a long visit. No, he has never been west, and I am sure he will enjoy himself here. The people are so kind, so whole-souled, I love them. In fact I feel this is home, and I will never be happy until father comes to make his home with us. I know he misses me more than he ever admits. Judge, how long since you have seen father?"

"Well, well! Let me see. I have not seen Walter Gray for more than twenty years. I left New York before the war, and Walter and I were boys. My father came west, then at the age of twenty I was sent east, to college, to Princeton, and Walter was in my class. I have not seen Walter for more than twenty-five years if I remember right. I have not seen him since we had our farewell spree in New York the night I left for this country."

"Judge, do you know, I feel all the time

as if I have seen you, or knew you, before, but it may be that you remind me of father. Have you a family?"

A sadness came upon him, and looking far off through the window he answered, "Yes, child, I have a family. My wife is an invalid, and has been for years. My daughter is on the stage, my two sons are in the navy. You see I have a family, but I am a lonely man. My winters are spent in Washington where I am a busy man. The summer is passed looking after business of my own. happy you should be here. Your husband is the coming man of this country. I have been all over the state, and everywhere he is spoken of with honour. He is gaining the people. The only objection I have to him we are on opposite sides of every political issue. You know I am as staunch a Republican as he is a Democrat, but we will be friends. I admire him for his perfect faith in his own ideas."

Flora and Judge Burns talked on until the butler announced dinner. She and the judge led the way to the dining room. When the four were seated conversation flowed freely. Tom was never prouder of his young wife.

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Wit and repartee were exchanged among them, and the Judge openly admired the brilliant woman. Dan Lane smiled on her as usual, always throwing a compliment her way. The dessert was brought, and soon cigars were lighted. As they left the room, Tom took Judge Burns by the arm and walked ahead as Flora and Lane were looking at a new punch bowl Flora had just received from her father. He whispered, "How beautiful my little Flora is to-night. I was quite jealous of my friend Burns."

"You didn't show it," she said quickly, with flushed face.

"I didn't dare. I kept Tom busy talking. I wanted you to feel that I was his friend. It is an important thing we have to do now, Flora. You must help me. I am to choose in the next few days between the friend of a lifetime, my father's friend, the man that started me on the road to success—I am to choose between him and—you—you, Flora. Not Tom. It is for you that I will give up all. Promise me that you will look kindly on me, not turn from me in disgust as you have always done. Promise that you will share

your smiles, your love. Oh, Flora, I love you more than my God! More than gold or ambition. Tom loves his ambition, he is proud of you as a toy, he owns you. You know his one idea is to be governor of this state. He would sell himself, he would give everything he possesses to occupy the governor's chair. Let me tell you something, Flora, you can do this thing for him; will you?"

As his words poured out, one sentence of love for her after the other, she was hot and cold by turns, trying to compose herself.

"Why, Mr. Lane, you must have had just one too many, didn't you?"

"No, no. Since the first time I set eyes on you I have had your face before me. The more you repulsed me the more determined I was to be near you. As the days went on I found out it was love that I felt for you. The night you asked me if I wasn't going to vote for Tom for mayor, and I told you you could buy my vote with a kiss, the things you said to me then have never left my mind one minute. Now, I want to tell you that one week from to-day I must know, and from you, whether I make the nominating speech

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for Tom West of Salem for governor, or for Jeff Wilson of Indianapolis. You, Flora, must control my influence."

By the time the library was reached Flora tried to be her bright self, but she grew pale and red by turns.

"Are you feeling ill, dear?" Tom asked, as she sat quietly listening, and trying to make up her mind what to do.

"No, no; I was just listening to you gentlemen, and wishing I was a man."

"Would you be a politician, Mrs. West?"
Dan Lane asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Wait until this fall, then I will tell you. You know you may hold a hand full of trumps in this game, and unless you have the joker the whole game is lost."

"Why, Flora, what do you mean?" Tom asked.

"Just this, dear: you may have the good-will and the votes of the best men, the trumps, in the state. There may be one man with a great deal of money, just one man, who employs a great many people. He has a wide influence. He is the joker, the high card. If you can't play him, the game is lost. So

you see, dear, you must hold this high card to be the winner."

"Oh, but my wife is beginning to be a real live philosopher. She begins to think things out."

Dan Lane sat with a queer look on his face. As he and the Judge were saying goodnight, he found a chance to say to Flora, "I am the joker in the game, hey? Mind, you play me in the right place."

When Tom and Flora went to their room both were quiet. The house was in darkness. Tom, sleeping, little dreamed of the terrible vision his young wife had floating through her mind.

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WEDNESDAY morning dawned clear and bright. Flora, troubled in her own mind, gave no outward appearance of the dark forebodings of evil she felt. Tom seemed brighter than usual. It was plain to be seen he anxiously awaited Larry's visit. The compliments he received daily were very pleasing to him.

"Now, what can we do to entertain Larry? I am sure my little wife can make his visit a happy holiday for him. After a business talk he seems bent on having, we shall throw dull care aside and let him see that we can be happy even though we are far away from New York and Chicago."

Flora smiled at Tom. Oh, how proud she was of him. How she loved him. "Yes, we must do our best to convince him that love makes happiness. Oh, Tom dear, how I do miss Kate! How I wish she were here. I am sure she and Larry Lord would be the best

of friends. Who knows but what they might really fall in love?"

"Why, is my little Flora turning into a matchmaker? To be sure we miss Kate, but you know I am selfish enough to be glad she is prolonging her trip, for I have you all to myself, and when she is here you two are so chummy that I often feel a little jealous."

"Now, isn't that funny? I didn't think you ever felt the least tiny-weeny bit jealous of me," she said as she came close to him, laying her head on his shoulder.

"Oh, I don't of any one but Kate."

"Tom, I never have known what the feeling of jealousy meant until lately; I do feel jealous of your great ambition. I even imagine (I know it is imagination) that you think more of ambition than you do of me. Don't you know, dear, how we used to spend our evenings together? Now I so seldom have you to myself, always some man, whose influence you must have. Oh, my husband, give it up for me, your little Flora, who loves you better than life. Take up your law practice. Let's live a quiet life. Let's be as we were when I first came. Tom, Tom, give it up, I implore

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you, to-day, now! Write an article thanking your friends for all they have done and would do for you, but that a political career is not what appeals to you. Now, how happy we will be, dear. Oh, Tom! I love you so, I feel that if you enter this race for governor, our happiness is at stake."

She was almost exhausted when she finished this appeal. She looked up at her husband, his face set and cold, the first time she had ever seen that cruel expression. Pushing her from him, he said in a constrained voice, "So you beg me to leave the race, you whose help, whose counsel I relied on. What has changed you in so short a time? Only a few weeks ago, even last night, you seemed quite hopeful of my election. I am sure I can think of no cause that should change you so quickly."

"Oh, Tom, my love for you! I want you to myself. I can't bear to think of sharing you with the people. You have almost given me up now. What you will do in the next few months I can't tell."

"Listen, Flora. I don't wish to hear any more of this foolish cant of love. Ambition is everything! If you loved me as you say

you do, you would be the last human being to say, 'Give up the race.' I know what ails you. You are afraid I will lose and your pride will be injured."

Realizing that he had spoken harshly for the first time to his wife, he grew more gentle, saying, "Dan Lane says that I shall win. What Lane says in Indiana is pretty sure to go. There are a dozen men after his influence now, so cheer up, little wife. You shall be the envy of all the official family in Indianapolis, and think how your father will announce with pride that Flora's husband has just been elected governor of the greatest state in the west." Kissing the tears away, he bade her good-bye, saying, "Larry and I will talk our affairs over at the office, so when we get home you shall be our only subject. Now, dear, if I was cross, forgive me, for it was a shock to think you were not as happy and as ambitious as I. For all my life it has been my dream. When a little barefooted boy, sweeping the crossings for pennies, selling papers, doing every odd job I could find to earn money so I could go to school, I built my castles, I laid my plans. My people were

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good and honest, but poor. I worked my way through school, and came back home to live among my own people. It seemed to me they aided me with smiles of approval. When father died, and a little later mother joined him, I was left with baby Kate, only ten years old. I struggled against the call of public life. I gave to her all I could. As my practice increased and I reached out far from Salem, I knew that I must enter the public arena. For a time, Flora darling, my love for you engrossed every thought. After we were married and I had you secure, I again was filled with ambition. Now, dear little wife, be my inspiration. With your help I will surmount every obstacle."

Clasping her to his breast he kissed her forehead, saying, "No more doubts and fears, little wife."

Hurriedly leaving the room Tom was on his way to his office, but his was a heavy heart. He saw the eager face begging him to give up the race. "Pshaw! What ails the child?"

He was soon lost in the numerous letters of business, almost forgetting this was the day for Larry to arrive. He suddenly looked at

his watch. Ten minutes to one, and Larry's train due at two-thirty. "I will just finish this pile here, then for something to eat. I guess I will go home for lunch. Somehow I can't feel just right over this morning's little affair. I wonder if the 'first cross spell' always leaves such a bitter taste. Anyway I don't like to feel this way. I will go right now to Flora. I do want her to be as bright and happy while Larry is with us as she was when he saw us nearly two years ago."

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WHEN Tom West alighted from the car, he saw Dan Lane leaving the door. They met at the gate.

"Hello, Tom! I was passing by and thought I would step in a few moments and have a chat with the wife. You know I didn't like the way she talked about the coming campaign. She wanted me to get you out of it all. Somehow I want you to make the fight. I feel sure you will come out of the struggle in glowing colours."

Lane talked rapidly. Tom thanked him for the interest he was taking, insisting upon him turning back for lunch.

"No, no. I must go to the club. Some out-of-town fellows there. You see I must not lose an opportunity to say a good word for you. Everything counts now. Say, West, why can't you and the wife come down to the hotel to dinner with me to-night? She told me you had a friend coming from Chicago. I will be delighted to have him too."

"Thanks, old fellow, but Flora has prepared for dinner at home. You see she is quite anxious that my friends know what a delightful housewife she is. You must join us. Am sure Flora would be happy to have you, and you must meet Larry Lord. He is a prince of good fellows. I will say to Flora that you will be with us. Goodday."

"Good-day."

Lane was trying hard to make excuses for his visit, and to give Flora time to compose herself before Tom entered. It was a stormy scene he had gone through with Mrs. Tom West. He was not counting on seeing her husband for some hours to come. He knew Tom seldom came home to lunch now, so was a little abashed at meeting him. Flora had seen the two talking. Summoning all her nerve, she stood in front of her father's picture, with hands extended, asking help. She exclaimed: "Oh, my daddy! Dear daddy, forgive your little girl. She has lost the fight, but it was for Tom. I will help now, he will win, but his wife's honour seems to be the price of the office. What a dear price to

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pay!" Turning from the eyes that seem to pity her, this heart-broken woman went with smiles on her face to meet the man she had promised to "love, honour and obey."

"Ho, ho! My little wife has been besieging Lane to forsake me, has she? Burns told me he thought it advisable to give you a good talk. Did he convince you that the people want me, and that I am the man for the people, little girl?"

"Yes, yes, Tom, he did, and now we will forget that I was ever foolish and tried to persuade you differently. I guess I was just trying to see what my persuasive powers would do. Anyway, dear, you may now rely on me, I will leave no stone unturned to insure your election."

Going to the cosy dining-room, she walked to the side-board, poured two glasses of wine, and handed one to her husband. Holding hers high in an almost reckless way, she said, "Let's drink to Tom West, the next governor of Indiana."

They drank, then Tom filled the glasses again, saying, "To the wife of Tom West, who leads him on to victory."

Flora was so bright through lunch that Tom remarked it.

"I shall have Lane stop in often. I think he knows how to show you things in the proper light. By the way, he will be here for dinner to-night. He wanted us to join him, but I enjoy having my friends here. You know I am proud of showing them my wife."

"Oh, Tom dear, I am sorry Mr. Lane comes to-night. I just wanted to be to ourselves with Larry this once." Seeing the cloud passing over Tom's face, Flora quickly said, "Well, I know we will have a jolly evening, and I will do my best to show Larry that you, dear, have made no mistake in bringing to a close your bachelor days."

As lunch progressed, Flora unfolded her plans of entertainment for his friends.

"I have decided on a dance Friday evening. You know all the prettiest girls dance. What girl does not look her very best in her ball-room frills? I want Larry to see our girls at their best. You, of course, will take him to your club to meet your friends, and with drives and horseback rides I am sure

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his will be a jolly week. I was thinking, dear, of inviting Marian Lea to spend the week with us. She is so bright and lively, can entertain the worst stick that has ever been in town. Am sure she and Larry will be chummy."

"Certainly, dear, I think that a capital idea. Am sure we will enjoy Marian." Tom broke into a laugh. "So you are not the least bit jealous of my old flame, are you dear? You know Marian was picked out for me ere she dropped her dresses to her shoe-tops. After four years spent in an eastern school I think all Salem was a little disappointed because neither Marian or myself could see things as they did. She is a great girl, and I am glad you and she have become such warm friends. Say, Flora, why don't you try to make a match between she and Dan Lane?"

"Tom, you are making fun now, but I will tell you a secret. Marian told me she could not endure Dan Lane. She simply hates him, but on her father's account she is polite to him. You know Judge Lea has his eye on a federal appointment, and Marian is

a politician. She will work Dan Lane for his influence, you see if she don't."

"Tut, tut, Flora. I am really shocked to hear you give utterance to such stuff. The Lanes and Leas have always been friends, and Dan would stand by the judge, no matter what opinion Marian should hold of him. In fact, Lane is too much of a man to allow a woman to influence his vote and political affairs."

"Oh! Do you think so, Tom?"

"I certainly do, Flora, but we must be off to meet Larry. It is almost train time. I thought you would like to go to the train to say 'howdy do?'; then we would go to the office, and you could come home. I know he will expect to see you when he hops off the train."

"But, Tom dear, I am not dressed, and you haven't time to wait. You know I didn't expect you for lunch. You go, dear, and come home as early as you can, and I will do my very best to look my prettiest and smile my sweetest."

"I am sorry, Flora, but I will make excuses to Larry. Good-bye, I will come just as soon as I can."

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"LANE is too much of a man to allow a woman to influence his vote or his political affairs."

As Flora stood in her own room she spoke these words her husband had just uttered, aloud.

"Oh, Tom, if you only knew that man as I know him. You have put me in his power; your own words accusing me of lack of ambition for you decided me. Dan Lane knew what I meant when I told you to play the game of politics you must hold the joker. Can I ever forget this morning; his horrible kisses still burn my cheek. Oh, God! Have mercy on my soul! I have placed myself in this man's power, but I believe now that ere this game is over I shall hate my husband and become a reckless woman. I feel there are none to help me, even father. He admonishes me to treat my husband's friends with great respect; that Tom is the coming man of the

west and much depends upon his wife. Oh, father! If you could only know how much depends upon his wife. Back, tears, you are for a woman with a heart and soul. I have turned my heart into the great white rock called ambition. The sacred place where my soul did abide is now filled with one great desire, CAREER. Tom West's career. Soon all the papers will be filled with stories of his life, his early struggles and battles with poverty. How, by his will power he won the people, his wonderful achievements in his law practice, his force of character that compelled recognition by all. They will even speak of his great majority when elected mayor of his town. His home life will be aired, the devoted son and brother and his marriage three years ago to the daughter of Judge Walter Gray of New York."

As Flora paced the floor, muttering aloud all these things she knew would be blazoned to the world, she flung herself upon a couch. She almost screamed in her rage.

"Oh, God! oh, God! But it will not tell that his wife has sacrificed all to gratify him in the thing he holds above all else. On my

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knees I pleaded with that monster (man, Tom calls him) to let his friendship for Tom appeal to his honour not to consider me. I want to die when I think of his answer. Yes, I have almost lost, but I will fight a good fight to the end. I have his written promise that at the meeting called by the business men's league Dan Lane will present Tom West's name for governor; that he will support him and do all in his power to win for him the coveted seat. The price I pay for the promise——"

Throwing herself among the pillows she sobbed aloud. She was not conscious how long she remained there. A knock on the door brought her to her feet. The faithful servant who had come from her father's house wanted to know something of the arrangements for dinner. Seeing her mistress' swollen eyelids and flaming cheeks, she exclaimed:

"Are you ill, Miss Flora? Let me do something for you."

"Yes, Lizzie, I have a dreadful headache, but it will be all right. I will come with you and tell you about the dinner."

"Don't, Miss Flora; trust to me. I know. I can please you. Lie down and let me bathe your face. Oh, dear, oh, dear! and Mr. West so anxious for you to look your best to-night."

Flora insisted on going downstairs. She busied herself with preparation for her guest. His room was in perfect order. Coming back to her own room she began laying out her daintiest garments.

"I will take unusual care with my toilet to-night. No one shall dream of the change in Flora Gray that has taken place in these past few days. To-night Larry Lord will find Mrs. Tom West quite as pleasing as at our first meeting. If Dan Lane were only not dining with us. I so fear that I may by some look or word show how I hate him. I will keep a tight rein on myself. He shall not see me show any sign of this morning's scene. How I hate you, Dan Lane! I know you now, you villain, but you will not find me quite so easy to mould as you think. I will watch every move you make, and think by the time this race for governor is over you will find out that a woman is a dangerous thing, when she hates."

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Ten minutes later Flora stood in the drawing-room, smiling her welcome to Larry Lord, gaily talking to her husband and Mr. Lane. No one would have thought her heart was heavy, or that trouble was near her.

"We are so happy, Larry, to have you. Tom and I have been looking forward to this visit with genuine pleasure. The only thing we regret is dear Kate has not yet returned from abroad."

"I am indeed sorry not to see Kate. I feel that I have known her since she was a little girl. You, Tom, were an exceptional brother. Kate's was the picture that had the honoured place in his room, and Kate's were the letters looked for twice a week. Many good laughs we have had over her letters. She certainly told the Salem news, from the latest birth and death to the number of kittens tabby had found in the barn. Once she wrote Tom that his best girl (I think her name was Marian Lea) had a very pretty dress, but she looked a sight in it, because it hiked up in front. A great girl was Kate. I am truly sorry not to really know her, but

I will be coming this way often I think, and hope to know her better yet."

"I am so glad. Tom said something about

you having business out here."

While Larry and Flora were busily engaged talking of all that had taken place in the last three years, Dan Lane had scarcely taken his eyes from Flora. He thought he had never seen her look so beautiful, so animated. Why was she so interested in this Larry Lord? Where had she known him? He felt that he must join in the conversation. Going close to them, leaving Tom looking over a letter he had handed him to read, he said, "Mrs. West, I must say you are looking your best to-night. I am sure I have never seen you look half so well. Your gown is a work of art, and you must have hidden somewhere here in your home a French hairdresser, for your coiffure is as artistic as I have ever seen, even in New York."

"Thanks, Mr. Lane, but I have never indulged in the luxury of a hairdresser or a maid. I prefer to arrange my own hair, and do for myself what a lady's maid is supposed

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to do." Turning to Larry she said, "Now don't you like to see a woman do things for herself?"

"Indeed I do, Flora."

"Mr. Lane, Larry says Tom and I are to come to Chicago this winter, maybe for Christmas. I do hope we will. How I long for some of that gay life once more. Won't we have jolly times?"

"Well, Mrs. West, you will get quite enough gay life when you go to Indianapolis to live. You will carry the official set by storm. I am afraid you will never be satisfied to come back to staid old Salem. You will then be laying plans for Washington. I know you women."

Flora was struggling hard to keep her face smiling, and not show how she was burning up with hate for this man who dared to speak so. Turning to him she made an effort to speak with ease. "Mr. Lane, is that the impression I have made here after living among you for three years? I will tell you that the happiest days of my life have been spent here in Salem. The day I leave this dear home will be the very bitterest day I will ever know.

You know women love home, men love ambition."

Larry caught her arm and speaking in a gentle tone said, "Flora, do you dread the life to come so much?"

"Oh, no, Larry; it is the grief for the days that have passed."

Tom was standing near. He was a silent witness to the little scene. The gong sounded, all trace of sorrow had fled. Dan watched Flora as she gracefully presided at the table, talking to them all, giving each one a smile that seemed the sweetest. The dinner over, Larry and Tom were deeply engaged in a business talk. Flora sat looking at a magazine.

"Won't you come into the conservatory with me? There is something I must say to you."

She looked at him coldly. "No, I cannot, to-night. I am entertaining my husband's guests. You may sit here and talk to me if you choose."

Seating himself, he whispered, "My beautiful darling, I am mad with jealousy. What is this man to you that he can call you

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'Flora'? I will do something desperate if you don't show me that you care for me a little."

"Mr. Lane, you are entirely aware of our understanding of each other. I have not hidden my hand. I am to receive you, I am to show to the world that you are my husband's trusted friend. You in return are to bring all your powers to bear in Tom's behalf. When he wins the race, then we will make our plans, but now there is nothing for either. We are tools in the hands of Tom West. Three years ago I took the vows to obey. I simply am doing his bidding."

"Flora dear, why are you so hard? Can't you see I love you better than everything? I would give up the whole world for you, just to call you mine. It is the ambition of my life."

"Hush, hush! You have promised not to speak like this to me until all is won. Then I will tell you what I will do." Poor Flora felt herself growing nervous. Must she fail here? No, no. She must be brave. Why was she so beset, what had she done?

"Come, Mr. Lane, let's join Tom and Larry in the library."

"Wouldn't you like to play me a game of billiards? I think you have me bested by three games. You know it must never be said that Dan Lane let a woman win any game from him."

Larry watched them at their game. What ails Flora? She is all excitement. He felt something was wrong. Why couldn't her husband read her as well as this man who had only been with her a week, three years ago? Throwing the cue down, she laughingly said, "Well, we are even now."

"Just one more, Mrs. West," Lane said.

"No, not to-night."

Taking a cigar from his pocket and passing one to Larry, Lane, after insisting upon seeing Larry often at his office, bade them goodnight.

When the door closed upon him, what a feeling of relief Flora had.

"Larry, how do you like Mr. Lane? He is the most sought after man in this part of the country. What he says generally is law

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here. When you want anything, go to Dan Lane and get it. To offend him would mean to die in ignominy." She was not aware of the contemptuous tone of voice in which she was speaking.

"I thought you liked him very much, Flora."

"You did? I am so glad; you know he is Tom's best friend."

When Larry was in his room that night he was haunted by Flora's manner of speaking of Dan Lane.

"There is something wrong here, poor little girl. I feel she is in deep trouble. I will see if I can find out. I wonder if Tom has given more time to politics than to his beautiful wife? He is somewhat changed, he is deeply engrossed in this campaign, and that may be the reason of his seeming indifference."

Larry's dreams were not pleasant ones. They were full of Tom and Flora. She seemed to be begging him to help her through some terrible trouble. When he was awakened early, before the house was astir, he felt relieved that night was gone. Taking his time

dressing, he hummed several pretty airs of popular songs. "No use talking, I must have them in Chicago this fall or winter. What in the devil does Tom want to be in the political pot for, anyway? He has a fine practice, beautiful home, and it seems to me I would rather be at home with Flora than to be racing over the country seeking an office that will not pay as much as my private practice. If he was an old bachelor like me, it would not matter." With a scratch of a match and a glance in the glass to see if his tie was correct, he gave a few puffs at a cigarette and went whistling down the stairs. The postman had left the mail. Finding several letters for himself, he was seated reading them when Flora and Tom appeared. She looked a little tired, but said she was quite well. Tom read his letters quietly.

"Oh, I have one from father. He wants me to come home for thanksgiving. May I go, Tom?" There was almost pleading in her tone.

"Of course, if you wish."

"Then I shall write to him at once. How father will plan for my visit. Just think,

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Larry, I haven't been home since I was married."

Breakfast was announced. While the men were interested in conversation, Flora was thinking of home.

"Oh, my dear old 'Dad-dear.' You don't know how I long to throw my arms around you and tell you everything, everything."

"Flora, you haven't said a word for ten

minutes. Are you dreaming?"

"Yes, Tom, I was dreaming of all the things I have to tell 'Dad.' I am to go just as soon as the election is over, am I not?"

The men lighted cigars and left for town. Flora still sat at the table, dreaming.

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THE days passed quickly. The time for Larry to leave was here. Flora had thrown all herself into this week of gaiety. Marian and Larry had seemed to understand each other from the beginning. Dan Lane was on his dignity, doing many pleasing things to entertain their guests. True, Tom was little with them, but Flora was schooling herself to get along without him. He had so much to do, so many to see.

"Flora, Dan will go with you to the reception," or "Dan will take you to the ball, I have been suddenly called out of town," was so often said to her now that she accepted his escort without any show of the irritation she felt.

"How I hate to leave you. I have had such a delightful visit with you. When are you coming to Chicago?" Larry was saying, as he stood ready to bid them good-bye.

"You may look for us this winter Larry,

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just as soon as I find out where I stand," Tom said, "I think we both need a change. Flora will feel the excitement of the next three months more than she thinks. You know, Larry, I believe all women enter into these things with a zest that a man knows nothing of."

"Well, old fellow, you have my best wishes and congratulations in advance. I feel sure you will make a winning. Flora, take good care of yourself. I fancy you are living in too much excitement. When Kate arrives tell her how much we missed her. You must be sure to let me know when she passes through Chicago, and I will see what we can do to pass the time pleasantly. Can't you meet her there?"

"Thank you so much, Larry, but I will be in New York with father. I will see her when she lands. Be sure I will put in a good word for you. Why can't you come on to New York?"

Tom spoke up quickly, "Larry, Flora is doing her best to get you into the family. She has had that in her bonnet ever since she met you."

"I do hope she will succeed, Tom." Shaking hands with Flora he again told how he had enjoyed his visit.

As Flora watched Tom and Larry board the car she turned into the house with a sigh.

"Oh, what is to become of me? I am so miserable. Tom has only one thought. Why can't he see that I am unhappy? Why must I be tortured so? Is it worth it? Three months!" She rocked back and forth, trying to make herself believe she was mistaken in many things.

"Yes, he is different, he is sarcastic. I often find a look in his face that frightens me. When I do the least thing he is cross. The very things I think would please often irritate him. What is it to lead to? Anyway, Larry had a good time. Marian and Tom were very queer sometimes, but I did all I could. I do wish Kate was here. She could help me. Oh, oh, Tom! can't you see I am slipping away and you are pushing, pushing me on?

"I must be dressing, for I am to lunch with Mr. Lane and some out-of-town friends."

The next three months were filled with

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dinners, lunches and dances. Never had Flora been so sought after. She was the gayest of the gay. She seldom saw her husband, as he was making speeches, going from one place to another. Dan Lane was with her continually. He was her husband's campaign manager, so, when he went to her home to lunch with her very nearly every day, it was always to talk quietly over the political situation. Flora had thrown her heart and soul into the task she had set herself to do. Lane fairly worshipped at her shrine. He flew to do her bidding, he spent his money lavishly, he talked Tom West from morning till night, he backed his statements with bets on the winner. Never was known such a hot campaign. The Republican candidate was a man of wide influence, who had served the people for years in many public offices, but Dan Lane had declared that Tom West was the man to save the state. Only one week more, November would be here. It would all be over. Poor Flora, torn in mind and body, was almost distracted. Her husband had said many cutting things to her of late, but she made no retort. She was waiting for the end.

As she dressed herself for dinner she knew her gown was becoming. There are some women who can hide trouble, or even if it peeps out it beautifies. There had come into her face something that was not there when she was a gay, happy girl, a sacred beauty. One thought of heaven when looking at Flora West. Sadness was in her eyes, her mouth was determined. You knew she was a woman with heart and soul fixed on a purpose.

Flora had made a discovery in the last few weeks that had brought both pain and gladness to her. "I will tell Tom to-night. Maybe it will make him turn to me some. I feel I am losing him inch by inch."

Going downstairs she saw her husband seated in a large chair. With great desire to whisper the glad tidings to him, she slipped up behind him, putting her arm around his neck. There was no response. He sat cold and still. She leaned over him, kissing his forehead.

- "Are you tired, dear?"
- "No, no more than usual."
- "I am so glad we are to dine alone to-night. It has been so long since I had you all to

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myself. See, I put on my very prettiest dress. I want you to tell me how pretty I look, how proud of your little wife you are, just as you used to do."

Giving her a cold stare, he surveyed her from head to foot, saying, "Too bad Lane isn't here to pay you silly compliments, if you have grown so used to them that you can't pass even one evening without them."

What had she done, what had she said, that her husband should speak so to her?

"Why, Tom, what do you mean? Isn't Dan Lane your best friend? Doesn't he come here at your invitation? Haven't you thrown me with him continually for the past year? You seem to have been unable to pass a day without his help on some subject. Haven't you always told me to treat him with every courtesy? Now you say such things to me."

Seeing the look in Flora's face, he feared he had said too much.

"Can't you be teased a bit? I just thought what a pity Lane couldn't see you to-night as you are really very beautiful."

"Thank you for the forced compliment, but

I think it hardly worth the effort. I believe dinner is served."

A quiet, almost untouched meal was gone through. A peal at the door bell. Lane's voice was heard in the hall.

"Flora, I am delighted that you wore your prettiest dress for me to-night," Tom said, in a sarcastic tone, going into the hall, where Lane was busy removing his overcoat.

"Tom," she heard him say, "I have just gotten a telegram from Foley in that doubtful county. He thinks if you could come Tuesday and make a speech that it would fix things in pretty good shape. Think fast, I want to send a message to-night."

They sat and talked over the prospects until late at night. Flora, going quietly to her room, removed her beautiful gown that had grown hateful in her sight, and slipped on her dressing gown. Walking the floor, striving hard to keep the tears back, she mourned in silence.

"He shall never, never know. One week from to-day I will go to father. How I hate him, hate him! No, no, God forgive me, he is the father of my child. I will do my best

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to be absolutely indifferent, but he has broken my heart. He shall never know that God has sent him this jewel. I will guard it with my life."

Twelve o'clock Tom came into his wife's room. He found her pale and silent.

"Why didn't you come in to see Lane? I am sure he must have thought it strange."

"Oh, I thought I would come to my room, and see how it would feel to go through one evening without silly compliments."

"Well, if you had listened you would have heard plenty, as he regaled me with your beauty and what a wonderful woman you are, and how much you have done for me in this race. He almost told me that had it not been for you he would have stood by his old friend, Jeff Wilson."

Flora listened to him without change of expression, giving no word that he could judge her feelings.

"I am leaving town in the morning for several days. Good-night."

He closed the door, going to his own room. She stood still for a few moments, then throwing herself on the bed, sobbed herself to sleep.

When morning broke she was weary but determined. Her mind was fully made up.

"He shall never, never know," sang through her brain all day. The few days that Tom was out of town went as all days do for heart-broken women, slowly. Flora to the world was the same. Dan Lane lunched with her, she was his guest at his club several times. She made up her mind that the game should be played to the end. She would not throw down her hand. But no matter which way the election went, she knew she would return to her father, there to remain. All the love she had for her husband was turned into contempt.

CHAPTER NINE

A PRIVATE wire was put into the West home. It was the morning of election day. Tom was coldly scanning his morning paper while his coffee was getting cold. Flora was reading a letter from her father, telling her how he was counting the days until she would be with him. Marian Lea came to the door. Flora heard the maid say they were having their breakfast, to come right in.

"I came to spend the day. I am so interested in the returns, I just had to be where I

could know what was doing."

"Of course you are interested," said Tom.
"Haven't we built castles many times of what we would do when we lived in the governor's mansion?"

"Yes, Marian, Tom told me that you and he were sweethearts when you were children. 'Whom first we love we seldom wed,'" she laughingly said.

"Flora, you have told me many times that

I was your first and only love," Tom said in a mocking tone.

"And so you were. I have never loved any man but you, and my childhood days can boast of no devoted swains."

The arrival of the young man who was to have charge of the instrument cut this conversation short. Taking his hat and coat, Tom remarked that there would not be much news before twelve or one o'clock, and he would go downtown.

"I met Mr. Lane as I was coming over," said Marian. "He says he is dead tired. Has been up all night, but he is positive that you are the winner. Tom, I am betting real money on you."

"So long, girls, I will see you before three. I hope you will win a big pile of money on this election, Marian."

These two were as different as night and day, Flora a small blond, Marian tall and dark, her hair and eyes as black as night. She loved Tom West, and had ever since she was a little girl. Why had this silly city doll come between them? Yes, she would tell Tom how the people were talking about his wife;

CHAPTER NINE

how much in love she was with Dan Lane.

"Say, Flora, do you know I am going to give you a bit of good advice? You must not give so much time to Dan Lane, and a little more to Tom. Do you know that already folks are beginning to say things? I contradict them, but you know the way of the world, especially when a pretty woman is in the case."

"Why, Marian, what could folks say of us? Isn't he my husband's best friend? Doesn't my husband request him to take me to places? I am sure I have done nothing to be ashamed of. If you people here care to amuse yourselves at my expense, I have no objection."

"Flora, don't get mad. I just told you for your own good. Can't you see that Tom is burning up with jealousy? If you don't change your tactics you will find that you have been playing with fire."

"Look here, Marian Lea, who are you that you come into my home and dare to say such things? You have overstepped your margin."

Marian, with a toss of her head, said, "I am Tom West's friend. I dare come and tell you

to your face that you are the talk of the town. The way you and Dan Lane have been seen together is scandalous."

Flora gave her one contemptuous look, and holding the door wide open, said in a cold, low voice, "Miss Lea, this is my home. There is not room enough in this house for us both."

Marian, with head held high, walked out, saying, "This is not the last you will hear of this, Mrs. West."

Flora closed the door and sat down in front of the fire. She broke into a hysterical laugh.

"So, I am in love with Dan Lane? Suppose I was; would I be here taking insults from my husband and his lady friend? Oh, for this day to pass! I never expect to lay my eyes upon this place or these people after to-morrow. My trunks are all ready. I will leave forever. To-night I will write Dan Lane and tell him what I think of him, and when I get home to father on his breast I will tell him all."

CHAPTER TEN

THE campaign was over. Tom West had won the office. How much he had given for his success he would find out later. Flora had gone to New York three days after the election. Her plan to leave the next day was prevented by Tom insisting upon her remaining to attend the banquet given in his honour by Dan Lane. Somehow she could not make smiles come. There was no flush of triumph on her face. She received the congratulations of the crowd with a set smile, and a "thank you" that carried no ring of pride. Many remarked that "poor Mrs. West was completely tired out. She must take a long rest, before going to Indianapolis to take up the duties of the mansion."

Tom West was never brighter nor appeared to better advantage. His speech thanking his friends for what they had done in his behalf was a masterpiece of oratory. In referring to Dan Lane he likened him to Damon in the

beautiful story of Damon and Pythias, who would have died in his place so that he might be spared to the wife who loved him so. As Flora heard her husband make this mention of her friend (?) she almost fainted, for hadn't Dan Lane told her in whispers only a few hours ago that he would soon claim his reward for what he had done? She sat like a beautiful statue through speech after speech. When toasts were drank to her husband and to herself, she barely touched the wine. Her mind was busy with plans for the future. She must act, and act quickly.

As she and Tom drove home in the early hours of the morning, she lay back in the carriage crouched in a corner like a hunted animal. She knew she was to have more thrusts from his sharp tongue. Try as she would, she could not accustom herself to these regular rebukes.

They had gone scarcely a block from the club where he had smiled and been so delightful in his manners to all those by whom he was counted the best fellow on earth, when, turning to Flora, he said in a harsh voice, "Your treatment of my friends to-night was

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disgraceful. Already they are whispering you have the 'big head.' You know this office is only the stepping-stone to congress, then the senate. You need not think because I won this fight that there are not other battles yet to win. Dan Lane asked me why you were so disdainful of it all. I told him you were ill, completely broken down, and made every reasonable excuse for you. I was ashamed to tell him you were pouting because he had taken Marian out to supper, that you missed some of his attentions. Now that the election is over, I am very sorry that you will be forced to forego some of the visits Dan has made you. I am sure he has felt the position you have placed him in very much, but as my friend he could hardly openly repulse you. When a woman gets her head filled with the desire for admiration, she will run the risk of her husband's honour and her own good name."

As these cruel words fell on Flora's ears she was like stone. There was no sound she could make. They had reached their home. Mechanically she went up the steps. There had been a time when Tom helped her, oh, so

gently. Now, when she needed it, he was far in advance. He didn't even hold the door open.

She found her faithful Lizzie waiting with an ominous looking envelope for Mrs. Tom West. She took it and opening it read: "Come, your father very ill—Dr. Cross." She could shed no tears. The fountain was dry.

"Lizzie, have all my baggage ready and I will leave for New York at seven in the morning. I believe that is the first train. Take this telegram into the library to Mr. West." She sank into a chair. She could not remove her things.

"Oh, God in heaven, let me live through this! I feel that I am turning to stone. Keep him, Father of all, until I reach his side. He must live now. I believe if I get to him he will live for me. He doesn't know how his little girl needs him."

She was interrupted by her husband coming into the room.

"When do you want to leave?"

"I leave on the early morning train."

"Flora, I am sorry I can't go with you, but

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you know it is impossible for me to leave here now. Lizzie will accompany you. I think the judge has had another of his gouty attacks. You will let me know if anything serious is the matter. Of course I will come on."

Was this Tom West who stood here talking in that cold tone to her, when her dear father that she had not seen for three years was ill unto death, maybe dead?

"Oh, I knew you could not leave. Lizzie and I will make the trip all right."

Without one word of sympathy for her now, he left her there in the night. Morning found her still with the handsome gown she had worn the night before. Lizzie coming in was surprised to see her mistress sitting just as she had left her.

"My dear miss, you have not slept?"

"Lizzie, my eyes refuse to close. Come, help me get this dress off. I will take that blue suit. Lizzie, you are a good Catholic. I want every breath you draw to be a prayer that we may get there before it is too late."

"Yes, miss, I have said my beads over and over. I know our Father in heaven will

spare the judge to you. He can bring the dead to life. I, feel sure we will find him better."

All was ready for the journey. Tom went to the depot to see his wife off. She had no feeling of regret that he was not to go. She only knew she was on the way to see her father who was ill. Her mind was filled with prayers that he would live for her.

"All aboard!" sounded. Tom leaned over and kissed Flora for the first time for weeks. "Let me hear by wire as soon as you get home. I will be anxious. Good-bye, Lizzie, take care of Flora."

Tom West stood on the platform watching the train until it was out of sight. She was gone. He had a lonely feeling already.

"I wonder if I shouldn't have gone with her? I know there is nothing serious. Dr. Cross is an old foggy and is easily scared. I will go to the office. I have so many letters to write that it will take me some time to get straight again."

Going to his carriage, he ordered his driver to go home and he would walk; the morning was fine and he needed an outing. His mind

CHAPTER TEN

was busy with many plans. He didn't notice the woman coming toward him.

"Hello, Tom! Why so pensive? You seem lost in thought. Are you already planning whose head is to fall in the great change to take place in the official family?"

"Why, Marian! What are you doing up so early? I thought after last night's dissipation you would have your breakfast and luncheon in one. Isn't that the way that you keep your dimples?"

"Oh, no indeed. I guess you judge me by your pretty wife, who no doubt is now dreaming of the pretty gowns and the devoted swains who will bow in homage to her will."

"Flora has just left on that train you heard whistle. She has gone to New York. Her father is not well. He sent for her."

"I hope the judge is not in a dangerous condition?"

"No, no; he is a gouty old gentleman. You know Flora had her mind set on going, so I thought the sooner the visit was over the better."

"Tom, what are you going to do with yourself? Now come and see us often.

Father often speaks of you. Poor father, he never has gotten over not claiming you for a son. Too bad, Tom, that you let pretty little Flora Gray cut me out." She laughed and nodded good-bye, but there was a sting under every word.

"Oh, yes, I nearly forgot to ask you what will Dan Lane do now that Mrs. West has gone? You know, Tom, you ought to be a proud man. Every fellow in town is in love with your wife. The women all envy her so. Dan Lane sings her praises from one day's end to the next. He was really distressed that Flora was so quiet last night. He is afraid she has been doing too much, entertaining too much. Really, Tom, people say that your wife was a great help to you in the campaign. No wonder you are so proud of her."

"What manner of woman is this?" he thought. "What she says is a compliment to Flora, but the way she says it I feel it an insult."

"Good-bye again, Tom. Now do come to see us. Give my love to dear Flora, and tell her not to stay too long. We will dry up and

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blow away without her to plan something for our amusement."

Marian Lea disappeared around the corner. Tom West looked at her with a strange sensation.

"I know she likes Flora. Why should she insinuate things about her? No, no, Marian, I will not believe you are that kind of a creature. You just run on and talk with little thought of how it will sound. You like Flora, I know it."

When Lane came into the office near noon he found Tom busied deep in work.

"Good-morning, your Excellency," he said, holding out his hand. "How is Mrs. West this morning? I do hope she is feeling better, poor little woman. She is a brave one. I tell you the strain of the last few months is telling on her. I think you had better take her away for a rest. You both need it."

"Oh, she will be all right now. When we got home last night there was a telegram calling her to New York. The old gentleman had a spell of gout."

"You didn't go with her! Why? West, don't you know your wife's ill? And at such

news as that she might have a nervous break-down on the way."

"Oh, I sent Lizzie, the maid, with her."

As these two men talked over business affairs, one thought, "Why should Dan Lane interest himself in my wife's health?" The other thought, "If she were my wife no power on earth could keep me from her when she was in trouble."

The hour for luncheon came. "Will you lunch with me at the club, West?"

"No, I am much obliged, but I met Marian Lea as I was coming to the office. I promised to come at one and lunch with her and the judge."

Seeing the look of surprise on Lane's face he continued, "You see I used to be like home folks there, but since I married I have neglected many of my old friends."

"Well, you must not get blue while the wife is away. I will be glad to have you drop in at any time. All the fellows at the club like you, and did good work for you. You must not fail to give us some of your society. We appreciate a good entertainer. When you come to think of it, they count you the best

CHAPTER TEN

fellow in the bunch. I hope Mrs. West will find her father out of danger. Should you hear anything, let me know."

Closing the door, Dan Lane walked slowly out into the street. He would send Flora a message that would reach her at Buffalo. She would know that he felt for her in this grief. Going to the telegraph office, he wrote this message:

"Hope you find your father out of danger.—D. L."

Paying the operator, he walked out.

"Poor little woman! She has changed in these last months. She is no longer the defiant creature she was. She looks sad and worn. Would to God I had the right to shield her! It seems to me that Tom West has no thought beyond his own selfish ambition. Why can't I win her? Who knows?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FLORA sat by her father's bed, holding his emaciated hand. For four weeks he had hovered between life and death. She had nursed him day and night, never leaving him. When rest was demanded by Dr. Cross she threw herself upon the lounge in her father's room to snatch a few moments of sleep, but the old man on the bed called incessantly for Flora. She would sit for hours with his hand in hers. He knew her touch, and her voice soothed him. Flora had not written her husband. She sent a message the night she arrived, saying, "Father better." She was now waiting for him to be strong enough to hear her story. She knew that Tom West must be told the truth. She could never go back to live with him. He had killed her love, she had done nothing to be ashamed of, she had simply done his bidding. The bitter, cruel things he had said would live with her always. Would he care?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

She lived over their life the first two years. How happy was it! Strange, that she could sit for hours musing over the many incidents. She tried to put Dan Lane from her. She would shudder when his face arose before her; the past year of misery, the hateful accusation, the sarcasm of her husband, the hard things he said to her. Oh, to be able to forget! But she knew they were burned deep into her heart. The scars would remain through life.

Dr. Cross came in to see his patient.

"We must take him for a little drive through the park. Fresh air will do wonders for him. Cheer up, Flora, child, he will soon be as brisk as ever, and you will be restless to get back to that husband of yours. You must tell me all about him some day, and how you like the political life. I know you were a great help to the coming governor. You will be able to grace the mansion and dispense hospitality that will go down in history and make old New York proud of her women."

"You do me proud, doctor, but I can tell you a woman stands mighty little show in the game. You know when a man fixes his eyes

on a star, he will push the moon and all the other stars aside to reach the goal. I have seen very little of Mr. West during the last year. His entire time is given to others. He is what is known as a self-made man. All things must give way to ambition."

"I am glad to hear you speak so, child. If there is anything I do honour in a man it is ambition, for one to come from the masses and by sheer will power and his own hard-earned education climb to the top of his profession, compelling the people to place him at the head of the government of his state. You should glory in his work. He is indeed a man to feel proud of. I always knew you would marry a man of brain."

Flora listened to this man praise her husband. She felt as if she could scream out and let the world know how he had tried to sell her; how she had fought with every breath the man whom he must have to manage the race for him; how she had all but made a promise she knew she would never keep. She had bought thousands of votes; bought the influence that must be had to purchase the office. How, each day she had made one excuse after

CHAPTER ELEVEN

the other for her seeming lack of appreciation of the situation. She knew when the last day came she would fly to her father for shelter Here was a good man, one and counsel. whom she had trusted all her life, extolling her husband's virtues to the skies. Strange, strange, but she was fixed in her purpose. Her mind was fully made up to tell everything to her father. She knew he would guide her right. Would he urge her to go back, live this life of misery with a man whose very presence filled her with loathing? No, she knew that he would take her to his heart and try in his own way to help her bear the burden. She knew she would never hear one word of reproach from him

Day after day Judge Gray grew stronger. It would not be many days until Flora could have his counsel. She received but few letters from Tom. When the father asked for him, she always told how busy he was. It was not yet time to raise the veil from his eyes.

Dan Lane had written several letters couched in the most gentle language. He told her of her husband's increasing popularity, the many functions in his honour. He

made no reference to things she dreaded. Her father's health was inquired of in the kindest way.

"We hope you will soon be home with us. Why don't you bring your father? The change of climate and association with your friends here in the west might do him a world of good. Tom is looking well and growing anxious for your early return. Believe me, sincerely,

"D. LANE."

Flora sat reading this over and over. "Why couldn't he be like this always? A good man at heart. I had thought I would write him a letter of hate and contempt for his pretended friendship. I will not do so now. I will thank him for all he has done, completely ignoring any idea of future relations, only as my husband's best friend."

A peaceful feeling came stealing over Flora. She felt that somewhere there was rest for her troubled soul.

CHAPTER TWELVE

JUDGE GRAY sat with his child, her head on his breast, his arms clasping her to him. He realized he was her all. The words of his wife as she was leaving this earthly home for one beyond came clearly back to him. When she knew her summons from on high had come, she placed her infant Flora in his arms and said, "Guard her from evil, share her burdens. She is the link that will bind you to me through life. When the great day comes you will bring her back to me."

Yes, guard her from evil, share her burdens. Flora sobbed her sad story, from the day she was a bride, how happy, until the fire of political ambition quenched every feeling of love in her husband's heart. She told how she had been accused of things so foreign to her nature.

The old man trembled with rage. Then, thinking of the trying days in store for his darling, he caressed her gently, telling her she

should never leave him again, that he would protect her from all evil.

"Oh, father, must I write and tell him that

I never expect to come back?"

"Yes, child, you must write him explaining everything. Leave nothing untold. Then should he make answer, I will see to all the rest. My fortune is large, you have your mother's inheritance, so there will be no need to speak of financial matters."

"Don't tell me that I must tell of the expected child. I must punish him. He must hear after all is over. I know how he longs for a son, and my prayer will be night and day for a little girl. I begin to know men as they are. I never want to bring a son into this world, who might break some poor girl's heart as mine has been broken."

"Hush, my child, you must now begin to let all beautiful things fill your mind. Try not to think of the injuries you have received. God in his own sweet way will heal the wound. Now go to your room and be quiet, and we will not speak again on this painful subject. You are the head of this house as you were before you left me."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Kissing her, he went to the door and held it wide. The old man watched his child as she climbed the stairs. Turning to his chair he sat down, burying his face in his hands. Tears of anguish flowed freely.

"Thank God, I am come back from the 'valley of the shadow of death' to watch over her and guard her from evil."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CHRISTMAS EVE. A regular blizzard was over New York. Flora West sat in front of the fire with her son on her lap, telling him Christmas stories and all about the wonderful things "Old Santa" did for good little boys.

"Mama, can't old Santa bring me a papa?" he asked, as he cuddled close to her breast. "I want a papa like Jimmy has, a big nice papa to ride me on his back and let me sit up by him in the big automobile and put specs on my eyes."

"No, son, that is about the only thing old

Santa can't bring."

Russel Gray West was three years old. Almost four years since she had returned to her father's home. Her life was spent quietly. Her little son was the idol of his grandfather. Flora gave him her heart and soul. She watched over him night and day. She made his happiness and welfare her one ob-

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ject in life. She had never mentioned to him the word "father." "Mama" and "granddad" were to be his all.

As she filled his little stocking and made ready the Christmas surprises, his question was ringing in her ears. "Have I done right to keep Tom West in ignorance of his son?"

Only one letter had passed between these two. She followed her father's instructions, writing Tom in detail why she could never come back to him. She said nothing of Dan Lane more than necessary. The answer to her letter was cold and cruel. Her father read it, then tore it into small bits, saying, "My child, the past is a sealed book, never to be opened."

Of course Flora's story was whispered for nine days, then the old friends began to drop in, and ere the first year had gone she was firmly established in her old place. Her father's smile was always for her. She made the evening of his life as bright as the noon had been. If she had sad moments they were never disclosed to him. When the little son was born, Judge Gray sat by her bed with the infant in his arms.

"My daughter, I beg you to call this child Russel Gray, for your sainted mother and myself."

She was happy to do his bidding. So, at the age of three, Russel Gray had never known his other name only as something he might use if he wanted to.

For hours Flora busied herself. She had planned a little surprise for the Judge, and the servants too were not forgotten. Leaning over her boy's bed to see if he was soundly sleeping, she kissed his cheek, and going into the library she rang the bell. Lizzie came with arms full of packages.

"Lizzie, we must get these all tied up. You know everybody likes Christmas things better when a goodly quantity of ribbon and holly are used in the draping."

Judge Gray came home as the hall clock chimed twelve, finding Flora and Lizzie still busy. He sat down and watched their nimble fingers.

"Oh, no, no. Now, 'grand-dad'" (Flora used the new name), "you must not look at the boxes. You might find your own, then you would be sorry in the morning."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"Well, I guess I am in the way, so I will take a peep at the boy, then seek a few hours' rest. I know that this house will be awake early in the morning."

"Yes, father, breakfast at eight sharp. I have the biggest surprise of all for you. I know you will be the happiest 'boy' in the house to-morrow." She kissed him goodnight. Her face was beaming with the joy of Christmas and excitement of her secret.

"Oh, it is not anything I bought; you must wait until eight in the morning."

Lizzie was the only one in her secret, as she had been chief in carrying out the plan. As Flora scanned the evening paper before dinner, she had gotten the habit of running her eye over the hotel arrivals. Often she saw names familiar to her in the west. Tonight she saw Congressman Willard Burns of Indiana in the city for a few days. How her heart beat! Would she ever forget her meeting with him? It seemed her life of misery dated from the day he came to seek Dan Lane's aid for his friend. She sat with the paper in her hand for some time, then going to her desk she wrote this note:

"DEAR SIR:-

"I hope you have not forgotten me, but if you have, try to remember Flora Gray West. I am making my home with my father. I write to ask you to come at eight in the morning and have breakfast with us. I want your visit as a happy Christmas surprise to him. often speaks of you, and never grows tired of talking of your success. I send this note by my faithful Lizzie, who was with me when I lived in Salem.

"Hoping for a 'yes,' I am "Truly your friend,
"Flora Gray West."

Truly, Colonel Burns was surprised. He was most happy to write a hurried note saying he would surely be with them at eight.

"I wonder why she left him? He is a stern man, but I am sure that Flora Gray could never do anything to cause the estrangement."

Tom West was now serving the second term as governor of his state. He was honoured among men, and women craved his smiles. Various were the excuses made by his friends for the separation of him and his wife. Marian Lea had come openly out and said that she knew that it had to come. She was

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with Tom a great deal, and it was well known that as soon as the divorce was granted she would make all effort in her power to become Mrs. Tom West. Colonel Burns had, of course, heard much gossip, but turned a deaf ear to anything that touched his old friend's child. In conversation with Dan Lane he asked Lane why Mrs. West was with her father. The answer was quick and decisive, "She gave no public announcement. West has never mentioned the subject to me, and I have asked no one else; but colonel, I feel that Marian Lea has been much to blame for the breaking up of that home. She loves Tom West, and has never recovered from the effect of his marriage. I know she has said bitter things of Mrs. West since she left, even insinuating 'a man in the case.'"

"Well, Dan, there is one thing we know, Flora loved Tom West with her heart and soul. She must have been sorely tried."

"Yes, I think she was sorely tried."

The subject was dropped and had never been recalled. Tom West went among his friends as usual. Many felt truly sorry for him, others had only a morbid curiosity to

know what the skeleton in his closet knew. Sometimes he would sit and think over his first two years of married life and wonder if the realization of his ambitious dream was worth the sacrifice. His Salem home was closed. He could not bear to look into the haunted rooms. She was there. Marian Lea had become hateful in his sight; in fact women in general were distasteful to him. He felt at war with all the feminine world. Kate was married and living in a small town. had two children that engrossed her every hour. She had told Tom plainly that she felt he was to blame. Before she went away she could see that his time was given to others, and she knew Flora loved him and there was no man had come between them. Kate also sent Marian Lea home with the idea well planted in her mind to be careful of what she said of Mrs. Tom West.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BREAKFAST was over. Judge Gray and his old friend Burns had gone into the den for a smoke and to indulge in boyhood reminiscences. The surprise of seeing his old friend had brought a happy twinkle to the judge's eye. Flora could be heard playing with Russel. She was enjoying the toys, so many mechanical ones that kept her and Lizzie both busy winding. The library looked like a toy shop.

"Walter, I didn't know that Flora had a son. I have never heard West speak of him."

The judge smiled and said, "I doubt if he knows that he is the father of the finest boy in New York. It was one of the things Flora wanted to keep to herself. Burns, I have never mentioned my daughter's trouble to any one. She and I have only spoken of it once, but if you care to listen I will tell you the whole story."

As Colonel Burns listened he knew why he

had felt pity for the beautiful woman the night he dined with her. He recalled how she spoke of the game of politics. He sat through the recital, and when Judge Gray brought the story to a close he looked at Colonel Burns.

"I am sorry, Walter, but I feel the poor child did what she felt was right. When I go back to Indiana, if I should see Tom West am I to mention seeing his wife and son?"

Lighting a fresh cigar, the judge said, as he watched the rings of smoke curl in the air, "I have long felt that West should know of his son. If you see him I have no objections to your telling him."

"I think with you, Walter, that he should know."

"Oh, granddad! Come quick. Mama can't fix the balloon worth a cent. I want you to do it."

Both gentlemen went into the hall where Flora was doing her best to get the big toy balloon blown up. Colonel Burns picked Russel up and lifted him high on his shoulder.

"How old are you, young man?"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

- "I am three years and four months."
- "And your name?"
- "Russel Gray."
- "Is that all?"
- "No sir, I have one more name."
- "You have? What is it?"
- "Russel Gray West."
- "What a fine name. Old Santa Claus has been very generous with you. He brought you everything you could wish for."
- "Yes, everything but one," the boy said, looking wistfully around at all the toys, "and mama said he couldn't bring that."
- "What could it be that he didn't bring? What do you want, Russel, that you haven't here?" Judge Gray asked.

Flora felt what was coming, and tried to distract his attention.

"Oh, grandad! I want a papa like Jimmie has."

Silence fell over the group. No one knew just what to say. Finally the balloon was working, and every one busy helping to make it go. The two old gentlemen were playing with the toys, and having a jolly Christmas.

Flora was thinking of her husband oftener than usual, for Russel was beginning to ask questions that were hard to answer. "I wonder if he thinks of me; if he is happy? Strange I have only heard once from Salem since Kate married. Dear old Kate. I sometimes feel if she had been there I would now be living my life, oh, so differently! I think of her so much. I know she is happy and I am glad, glad, glad. She wrote me two years ago and told me of her baby. Wouldn't I love to see her? I have never hinted to her that I have a son. I think sometimes I will write and tell her. Then I fear to share his love with any one. I know Tom would move heaven and earth to have him."

As she sat mourning on the past, Lizzie brought a box to her saying the boy said he was to wait for an answer; there was a note inside. She opened the box and found candy. Raising the lid, she saw a note to Mrs. Flora West. Why did she hesitate to read? She had received many remembrances, but somehow this one filled her with a feeling of fear. Tearing the envelope, she spread the neatly written sheet before her and read:

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"My DEAR MRS. WEST:

"I am in your city for a few days. I feel that I must beg you to see me. I wish to ask one favour of you.

"Your friend,
"DAN LANE."

What must she do? Here was the man she had hated, who she felt had come between her and her husband. What must she do? She was torn with emotion. Going to the library, she asked her father to come to her for a few moments. As the door closed she gave her father the note. He read it slowly, and turning it over said, "Flora, child, you cannot always hide yourself from those who knew you in your western home. Tell Mr. Lane we will be pleased to see him."

She wrote only a few lines, but as Dan Lane read them his blood rushed through his veins. He was going to see Flora. Almost four years since he had seen her. She had never answered any of the letters he had written. Tom West seldom mentioned her name, and he knew nothing only she lived with her father. Since Flora West left Salem, Dan Lane had changed. He was not

the egotistical, self-conceited person of years before. Now he lived quietly, dispensing charity and doing what he could for the uplifting of those around him. In his inmost soul he prayed God to forgive him for anything he had done in causing Flora's misery. She was so different from other women. When he first began to say the little soft nothings to her that other women seemed to like, it amused him that she objected. Afterwards when her sharp tongue rebuked him for his familiarities it nettled him, then real interest in this woman, and before he knew it he loved her above everything. When he saw that Tom West would go to any extent to gain his influence, he wanted to be with his wife, that was all he cared. He gave Tom West his influence, and West gave him his wife's society.

"I wouldn't have harmed a hair of her head," he repeated, "no matter what I felt at first. She compelled me to respect her. She told me plainly what she thought of me. From that day she was my ideal. Tom West could say things to his wife to break her heart, but to me whose influence he craved he was

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ever friendly. I wouldn't have seen half so much of her if he hadn't insisted upon my going with her. No use talking, he did it!"

Lane watched the clock. He was to go out there, it was near the hour. He would take a cab, as he was not familiar with the streets. Going out, he was soon seated in an electric and speeding toward the Gray home. As he drew nearer he felt nervous and wondered how their meeting would end.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FLORA heard the maid in the hall say, "Mrs. West is in, come this way."

She brought all her courage to bear. She wanted to be as cool and collected as if she were meeting an ordinary acquaintance. Going forward, she gave Dan Lane her hand, saying, "A Merry Christmas, Mr. Lane; this is indeed a surprise."

"How good of you to let me come. I felt I must not go back without seeing you. Your old friends would be much disappointed if I didn't carry them news of you."

"How kind of them all to remember me. Come sit here by me and tell me everything that has happened since I left."

Never was Dan Lane so entertaining. He told all the news of the old town, how Smiths had rebuilt their home, even to the girls and boys that danced and flirted. Not once did he mention Tom West. At last Flora said, "Mr. Lane, tell me of Tom. Is he happy?

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Does he still nurse his political ambition? Is his life filled with that one idea, to serve the people?"

There was a touch of sadness in her voice she could not keep out.

"Yes, Mrs. West, I think he lives for the people. He has made a good governor. I think he can get most any office he asks for."

"I am glad. He surely has given his whole soul for office."

They were silent for some moments. Dan Lane stood in front of Flora. His voice trembled as he said, "Mrs. West, I came here to beg you to forgive me if I was the cause in any way of your unhappiness. I realize now what you have suffered. I do not come here to insult you by professions of love. I came to humble myself before you. If there is anything I can do to prove my friendship, you have only to command."

As he spoke Flora knew that at last the real man was awakened. She felt that she could trust him now.

"Mr. Lane, stop, we must not speak of the past. When my little son was born—"

"Your little son," Lane interrupted.

"Yes, my little son." Touching the bell, Lizzie appeared and she said, "Send Russel to me."

"Why, Mrs. West, I am sure I can't understand you. West has never spoken to me of a child."

She grew pale. "No, I have never told him. The night I went to him to tell my secret he said the bitterest words I had ever heard. He accused me of things I blush to recall. I said then he should never know."

"Oh, Flora, you have borne all this alone?"

"No, not alone. Father was spared. He and I are happy."

The door flew open and Russel bounded in. "Oh, mama, what do you want? Me and Jimmie are having so much fun!"

"Why, dear, don't you see the gentleman? I want you to meet my old friend Mr. Lane. Shake hands, dear."

"I am indeed glad to know you, young man."

"Let me go now, mama. I have shaken hands with the man."

"Yes, run along. You see, Mr. Lane, he is a real boy, and not anxious to stop play

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long enough to pass the compliments of the day."

"A lovely boy, Mrs. West. Allow me to

say he is the image of his father."

"Yes, I too think he is like Tom West."

Evening came, the lights were turned on. Mr. Lane was saying good-bye. "I hope I may see you again before I leave."

"You may come whenever you like. I am

seldom from home."

"What will become of all this, when will it end? When I see Tom West I shall speak of the boy. I wonder what effect it will have upon him to know he has a son?"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

TOM WEST sat in the right-hand box next the stage. Mansfield was to play Beau Brummell. He was visiting his friend, Larry Lord, in Chicago. Larry had married a handsome woman from Denver, almost his own age. As Mrs. Lord leaned gracefully back and listened to the soft notes of the orchestra, she raised her lorgnette to see more clearly the party who were taking seats in the box opposite.

"Use your glasses, governor. I think you will see the most beautiful woman in Chicago. I have seen her several times. No one seems to know who she is. She is a visitor to our city I am sure, for one of her beauty couldn't live here and not become famous."

As Governor West raised his glasses he caught his breath and leaned almost out of the box.

"Oh, I see you have seen the lady before. Who is she?" Mr. Lord asked.

Turning to Larry, Tom West said,

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"Larry, my wife sits in the box opposite.
Do you know the party she is with?"

Larry Lord fixed his glasses on the box in question.

"No, I can't say I do, but I have seen both the lady and the gentleman often."

"I wish you would find out."

No more mention was made of the party. Mr. and Mrs. Lord noticed that the governor's eyes sought the box often. He seemed more interested in the beautiful woman who sat like a queen in a box than in Mansfield and his wonderful art. The curtain came down on the last scene, Beau Brummell in his attic, living, in his delirium, his court life over. It had brought tears to the eyes of many, but the tears in the eyes of the tall, handsome man in the box on the right were for days that had gone.

Already he began to see where he was in the wrong. Poor little girl, how you have suffered!

Neither Colonel Burns or Dan Lane had seen West since Christmas, so he was still unaware of his son. He was destined to hear of him sooner than he knew.

The day after he had seen her, he read in the evening paper:

"The luncheon and bridge party to have been given Mrs. West, of New York, by Mrs. Samuels is called off, Mrs. West being called east by the serious illness of her son."

Tom West read this very many times. "It cannot be. Flora has no son. Yet, Samuels was the name of the people she was visiting. I must know the truth. Oh, Flora, how could you keep this from me? I deserved some punishment, but not this, not this. I will leave for New York on the first train."

Turning to the railroad time-tables, he saw that a fast train left Chicago at midnight. Going to his room he walked back and forth, smoking, and occasionally speaking aloud.

"I must see my son. More than four years since she left me and no word has she sent of him."

When the limited train pulled out of the station for New York, there was one passenger who sat all night in the smoking-room of the sleeper. No use to go to bed;

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he could not sleep. He only wanted to think. Something must be done. Flora must come back to him. He would give up the whole world now; he knew what he had lost.

"We will go far, far away. We will start all over again. My son, my son, plead for me!"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FLORA, travel-stained and weary, sat by the bed of her boy. She had not removed her dark dress. Dr. Cross had met her at the station. He had been the one to persuade her to visit her friends in Chicago. He thought she needed a change. Never had she passed one night from her boy until now, but the judge and Lizzie were to watch him day and night. The two weeks' visit was to do her a world of good. She was torn with emotion. Why had she gone, why had she left him?

As the day advanced, no gleam of recognition came into Russel's face. Flora was wild with grief.

"Don't you know mama?" she asked softly, time and time again. "Take this for mama," and many coaxing things were said, but Russel was unconscious of his mother's presence. In the first few days of his illness he asked constantly for her, but now he was too near

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the end to know or care who ministered to his wants.

Judge Gray stood at the foot of the bed, watching for some change in the boy's face. The doctors were in consultation in the next room.

"Oh, father, he must live. He cannot leave me now," Flora moaned as she knelt by the child, watching every breath. Lizzie came in with a scared look, and spoke in whispers to Judge Gray. He seemed to straighten up to face the enemy. Going over to Flora, he said in a voice he tried hard to control, "Tom West waits downstairs to see you and his child."

She looked to him for guidance.

"What must I do? Oh, father, my burden is more than I can bear!"

Lizzie went down to show him to the room where his child that he had never seen was laying in the stupor that comes to those so soon to cross the river of death.

Judge Gray knelt by Flora and put his arm around her, whispering, "Be brave, my daughter, God knows best. He will help us in this great hour of need."

A soft step was heard. She knew her husband knelt on the opposite side of the bed. She knew sobs were convulsing his whole body. There was no word uttered.

The doctors came in. Standing near, Dr. Cross felt of the child's pulse, then placing his hand upon his forehead he felt the cold dampness that he knew was death.

When the morning broke, all that was mortal of Russel Gray West had gone to his Father in heaven. Flora fainted as it dawned upon her that her darling was no more. When she came out of the dazed state she was in mad delirium. Her reason was gone, she raved. She spoke only of her terrible trouble. She lived over the years of her life in Salem. She was Flora West, the politician's wife. She went through scenes with her husband. Day after day she was begging him to give up the race. Then she would walk the floor counting the terrible things of which she was accused.

Judge Gray was like a statue. No one save he and Lizzie and Dr. Cross were allowed to be with her. Tom West had begged to stay and try to win her back,

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but the sight of him seemed to add to her delirium.

Russel Gray was laid to rest by the side of his grandmother whose name he bore. As Tom West drove to his hotel his heart was heavier than he had ever known. He knew now how she had loved him and how he had thrown that love away. There was nothing for him to do but go as far from this place as possible. He was not fit for any plan of work. He must leave it all behind.

"Oh, Flora, I want you now. I know what you have suffered. The rest of my life will be given to you though I am far from you."

Days went into weeks. Flora gave no sign of returning reason. Her father had taken a quiet place on the Hudson. There with Dr. Cross and Lizzie she was tended carefully. Nothing was left undone that could help her.

After three months of raving she settled down to a stony grief. She sat for hours gazing at the river. She hadn't noticed that she was not in her father's home. She was thin, and her hair well sprinkled with grey. No one could have recognized the beautiful Flora West in this sad-eyed woman.

Summer was coming on, and the days began to get warm. Judge Gray concluded to take a long trip abroad. He felt that the change might bring reaction. He must leave no stone unturned. He feared to go back to the city home. At sight of the familiar things her raving might come back. So it was all arranged that Dr. Cross and Lizzie should go with them for a year in the old country. If Flora improved as the doctor thought, they would not come home until she was entirely well.

The mention of the trip was the only thing she had taken notice of. She said to her father when he asked if she would like it, "Yes, yes, anywhere, it does not matter now."

The first of July found them on the ocean, bound for Liverpool. Flora, seated on the deck, watched the high buildings grow dimmer. Resting her head on her arms, she leaned forward and broke into sobs that convulsed her body.

"Let her weep," the doctor said, "it is best. You know no tears have been shed. She will be better after the storm."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

FIVE years since Flora West had knelt by the bed of her dying child, with no word of pardon for her husband whom she felt had abused her love.

Tom West went from the grave of his son, out into the world, a man bowed in grief. He watched the little sufferer as he lay in the grip of that terrible disease, diphtheria. He saw the miniature image of himself, the high classic brow; the eyes that roved from one point to another in restless delirium he knew were his own. If prayer could have saved, little Russel Gray would have lived to unite his father and mother.

When Governor West left New York it was to wind up his affairs to go to a strange land, there to be a wanderer seeking forgetfulness. Peace he knew would never come to his troubled soul. As he wandered through foreign lands no word reached him of Flora. Only once had he heard, and that before she

left New York. A letter from Dan Lane reached him in Constantinople. He told him that he heard that Mrs. West was still in a state bordering on dementia.

Joining a party of explorers going to the diamond fields of Africa, he passed five years, a grey-haired, broken old man, who became known to all in the camp as the "Silent West." He took no part in the gambling or any of the amusements of the miners.

One morning he was missed from the breakfast. Going to his hut, Sam Ran, a big jolly American, found him in a stupor and high fever. Asking if there was anything he could do for him, West told him to place writing material by his cot, as he would spend part of the day writing to some of his people in America. Placing food and water close to him, Sam said, "Now, old fellow, I will come up early to-night. I won't join the boys in their jaunt to the colony." Closing the door, Sam went whistling to his digging.

As West lay on his cot with burning fever, he lived every day with Flora. Where was

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

she? Was she dead, or worse, confined in some madhouse? With his burning fingers he clutched the pencil and wrote the last lines he was destined to write to Judge Gray:

"I am sick in South Africa. I feel that when these lines reach you I will be before the Judge of the Universe, who will be lenient to me, a penitent miner. I have paid for all the suffering I caused my wife, for never have I had an unconscious hour. Her face and the face of our boy have been before me day and night. Had the child lived he may have softened her heart toward me, but God saw fit to take him. Since the day I knelt by the bed praying God to forgive me for my sins, and saw the life leave him, I have been a wanderer on the face of the earth. If my wife lives, my will is all in her favour. I want her to have the fortune that I have made. She shared not the honours the people gave me, but may the fruits of the ambition in her hands do good. If she is no more, you are instructed to build a home for friendless children, where good women will watch over and guide them to useful lives. Dedicate this home to my son, Russel Gray West. Pray God to soften your

heart toward me. With the confidence in my soul of forgiveness on high, I am, "Tom West."

When Sam Ran came in towards dark, he found West sitting on the side of his cot.

"I am glad you came, Sam. I want you to read this letter, and sign your name here in witness that I wrote it. I want you to promise me, old boy, if I die that you will take this to New York to Judge Gray. I cannot trust the mails; they are too uncertain. Here is another one you must deliver, too." And Sam read, "Dan Lane, Salem, Ind." Unbuckling his belt, Tom West began to count the gold coin he had hidden.

"Here is money to more than pay you for your trouble, and you will not be gone from your claim long."

"Why, old fellow, you are talking all for nothing. You will be all o.k. by morning, but I promise if you do shuffle off I will take the trip. Kinder think I would like to see old Uncle Sam once more, and it seems I can never make a stake here. So rest easy. After we plant you I will take the first boat out."

Joking about the various matters is only

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

the miners' way. Their hearts are more tender than many who dress in the latest style and dine at six in the fashionable café.

"Well, we will turn in old fellow. I will not leave you alone to-night," Sam said, as he began to throw a blanket down in front of the door.

West took a few turns up and down the cabin, then threw himself upon the bed and fell asleep. Toward morning Sam was awakened by his friend calling, "Flora! Flora!"

"Oh! I knew a woman had something to do with it. They are all alike; get a fellow dopey about them, then marry the dude next door."

As West's voice grew more and more plaintive, begging Flora to come back, Sam got up and lighted the candle. Feeling the patient's head, he was shocked at the burning fever. He called one of the boys and sent for the camp doctor. Kind hearts and willing hands did all they could for Silent West. For days he raved in delirium. When days had gone into weeks he grew quiet, and would lay all day without one word to those about him. It was soon known among the

boys that Silent West was in mind a child.

When he was able to sit up he would play with anything that was handed him. All the boys were good and kind to him.

It was not long until he went about the camp as a child would, picking up rocks, throwing at birds, amusing himself in many childish ways.

One bright Sunday morning, around the camp Silent West was missing. No one paid much attention, thinking he had wandered off in search of the birds' nests he found so much pleasure in. Night came, no sign of the missing child-man. Morning came, and he had not returned.

Sam Ran proposed to hunt for him. For days they scoured the country around. Not a sign could be seen of him. He was as completely lost as if the earth had opened and swallowed him.

It was a nine days' wonder how Silent West had stolen away in the night. The miners were all doing their best to make a find. Some of them had been from home for years, and were growing homesick, but were

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

determined to have something to take back to the old folks.

It had been more than a year since Silent West so mysteriously disappeared. No one knew of the two letters that lay close to Sam Ran's breast. Christmas was drawing near and as the boys sat around campfires, living the old Christmas days over, and wondering who would be in their places, sadness filled the air. A quiet, reminiscent feeling was over all, when suddenly Sam Ran broke the stillness.

"Boys, I am going to quit you, for a while anyhow. I want to tell you for the last year something has been pulling me back to Uncle Sam, stake or no stake. There is an old woman in a little Indiana town who prays for her boy every night. I feel her prayer and I am going to ship to New York on the first steamer that leaves this port. I am going to get my pack together. I tell you all good-bye. I may come back if things go as hard with me as six years ago, but anyhow, I will see her if God has spared her." So saying, Sam Ran rose to leave.

Standing there with their rough clothes

and bared heads, one after the other bade him Godspeed and sent many messages to loved ones. Sam Ran went to his cabin and gathered his few belongings together. Shaking hands with his companions, he started with his pack on a stick hung over his shoulder to the port, ten miles off.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

There were a goodly number of passengers on board. There had been a gay mingling of new-found acquaintances, but none could make out anything substantial of the big, broad-shouldered man, who seemed to shun the rest of the passengers.

As Sam Ran walked the deck of the vessel, only one thought filled his mind. Was it right, the thing he was about to do? Maybe Silent West was not dead. What if he should turn up after a few years? So the time was passed, and when New York was reached, Sam Ran had made up his mind to deliver the letter, and if he was asked about the death he would tell of his fever and delirium, and add that Silent West slept on the hillside of the claim owned by Sam Ran. Strange, how peaceful he felt after making up his mind to this deception.

Soon after reaching New York, Sam Ran

was looking for Judge Walter Gray, to be told at his office that Judge Gray was abroad, and would not return for several months.

"Then I will find Dan Lane."

After purchasing a ticket for Salem, Ind., he seated himself in a first-class coach. Pulling his hat down well over his face he said to himself, "Mother, it is for one kiss from your lips, and to hear you say that you forgive me for all the heartaches and pain I have given the best mother a boy ever had."

Falling asleep, his dreams were of Silent West, who always smiled at him with a whispered, "Sam Ran, take my letter to America."

CHAPTER TWENTY

PAN LANE sat in his office reading the letter which Sam Ran had just given him. His face was drawn. One could easily see that real grief filled his heart. As he read the scrawl, almost illegible, his mind was filled with thoughts of this man, to whom he had vowed allegiance, not for friendship's sake, nor belief in his principles, but to gain the love of the only woman he had ever loved. He saw plainly now how much he had done towards the breaking up of that home. He knew he was guilty.

All these years since Flora West had gone to her father Lane had tried hard to feel that Tom West's was the hand that dealt the blow. But now he sat a convicted criminal in his own mind. West had written asking him to aid Flora in many matters that would come up. His will, and all personal papers, were in his safe in the Lane Trust Company. "See that Flora has all. If she is at rest, Judge

Gray, with your assistance, will build the home for friendless children. The yearly income on my property will pay the expenses of such an institution."

Sam Ran felt that his had been a sad mission, but one that would be the means of much good. Lane asked of West's life. Ran could tell very little. He could only say that he never spoke of any family or friends, and the boys had called him "Silent West." He was a straight pal, though. You could gamble on that, and what he told you.

After a few moments' silence, Lane turned to Sam saying, "Yes, he was a straight pal, but ambition was his undoing."

The two men talked over all that Lane could tell of West's story. "Have you found Judge Gray?"

"No, he is in Europe and will not come home before the summer is over."

"Will you stay in this country to deliver the letter, or will you trust me to give it to him as soon as he arrives? I have business in New York this fall, and if you will trust me I swear that from my own hand he shall take the letter."

CHAPTER TWENTY

Sam Ran looked into Dan Lane's eyes without one blink of his eye. As the two stood facing each other, each trying to read the inmost soul, Ran slowly produced the letter he had carefully wrapped in a piece of yellow oilcloth and sealed with the green wax used in mining camps. Looking at Lane, in a steady voice he said, "I can trust you," and placed the queer package in his hand.

"This wrapping will not be removed until Judge Gray himself shall break the seal."

Bidding Lane good-bye, Sam Ran went to the little railroad station to take the train that would land him in his native village, there to visit his old mother, who had heard no tidings of her son for more than ten years.

"This fellow Silent West seems to have been a real aristocrat. What in the devil did he want to be digging for diamonds and living like a broken-down miner for? Oh, well, this is a funny world."

He pulled his hat down over his eyes, and when eight hours later the station was reached to which his ticket read, he was so soundly sleeping that the porter had to give him a vigorous shake to awaken him. As the train

pulled out the passengers looking out of the windows saw a tall, roughly-dressed man standing on the platform, looking about him as if trying to locate himself in some community in which he had once been perfectly familiar.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

JUDGE GRAY and Flora were settled in their old home. Flora's health was recovered, but instead of the beautiful girl of ten years ago was a woman more beautiful than she had ever given promise. Her figure was the same, a graceful, dainty little body; her eyes had become deeper and bluer, her once golden hair was as white as the driven snow. People would turn to look at her unusual beauty. There was a smile of resignation in her face that had dispelled the piquant beauty that had once made the beautiful Flora Gray so interesting.

Years had dealt kindly with the judge. He went about his daily affairs with the same regal manner. No one to look at him would dream of the sorrow that had been in his life.

"Flora, my child," he was saying, "I had a letter from Mr. Lane asking for a conference with me. You know this is the day

for him. If it will be painful for you to meet him I will see him at his hotel, or he can come to my office."

Flora placed her hand on her father's arm. "No, father, let him come here. You know there is nothing now that can hurt. After you have talked over the business matter Mr. Lane mentions, send to my room for me. I will come down to see him."

Dan Lane and the judge, two hours later, were bending over many official papers in deep discussion of values of property specified.

"Judge Gray, I knew that Tom West had accumulated a great fortune, but I never dreamed it half so large."

"I am sure, Mr. Lane, that my daughter will never touch one cent of this vast fortune, but I believe she will follow the instructions given me in case she was dead. A memorial in honour of her son would appeal to her, for she thinks of nothing and counts his loss the blow that dethroned her reason for more than two years. Anyway, I will send for her. We will read the letter of a dying man to her. She will tell you what is to be done."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

A few moments later, when Lizzie came to find Flora and tell her that she was wanted in the library, she found her carefully placing Russel's toys in a large box, to be sent to a home for crippled children.

"Oh, Miss Flora! Are you going to give all the beautiful things away?"

"Yes, Lizzie, the toys made him who was so well and strong happy. What pleasure they will give to the poor little cripples who know so little of the beautiful things of life. Russel Gray loved to make those around him happy, and the little cripples always appealed to him. Lizzie, I expect to devote much of my time administering to the poor little waifs of the street. I never see a little newsboy, barefooted and ragged, that I don't want to take him to my heart. Oh, yes, tell father I will be down in a few moments."

The two men standing by the table piled high with papers felt rather than heard some one enter. When Dan Lane saw the beautiful vision he gasped for breath.

"Oh, Flora, Flora!" was all he could say. She held out her hands, he took them mechanically. He could only gaze into the sad face.

Dropping one hand, he placed the other upon her white head. She smiled up in his face, saying, "No, not in a night, but in ten years of agony and remorse."

The judge drew a chair close to the table, telling her to listen to all that he would say. A matter of grave importance was before them. As gently as he could he told of the wanderings and death of Tom West. He read her the letter that West had written when he felt that the spark of life was about spent. As he read on she bowed her white head upon the table. She sobbed silently. Mr. Lane then told her of the request that she should have and use his fortune but, as he spoke, she raised her head, her eyes red and swollen.

"Am I to use it just as I see fit, without interference?"

"Yes, Mrs. West, it is yours to do with as you please."

Then she said in a voice that trembled, "I will take it. Mr. Lane, as my husband's friend, I ask you at once to help me plan and build a home for the friendless children just as he asked my father to do. It must be in

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

the town of Salem, and instead of being in memory of my boy alone, it must be a monument to the memory of Tom West and his son Russel Gray West." She finished speaking and rose to her feet. A flush had mantled her brow. Never had Flora West looked more beautiful than now. Dan Lane bowed his head as in benediction as he listened to her unfold her plans for the home. When he left her that night it was with the promise of seeing her again within a few weeks, with every detail of construction and location of the institution that was to be known as the Russel West Home for Children.

As the days went into weeks every hour of Flora's time was taken up with the letters she had to write, and numerous business matters that came under her personal eye. Judge Gray was pleased to see the eager look in her face. She no longer sat in the dusk and stared into a vacant gloom.

"Oh, father! Just think that ere another year goes by all will be ready. The little ones will know what a real home is. I sometimes think that I must go and live there to be with the children.

The poor old man sighed, and then he smiled upon her. "My child, your happiness must be the only thing considered. I care not where I spend the remaining years, but your life is all before you."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

TWO years from the day that Sam Ran left the mining camp in far-away Africa all Salem was gathered together, and those for miles around who had loved Tom West as a boy, and honoured him as a man, were there to listen to Dan Lane as he dedicated the home for friendless children to their old friend and citizen, Tom West, and his son, Russel Gray West.

Flora and her father were there. Dan Lane dwelt upon the early life of Tom West, of his struggles with poverty; how he had won the highest office in the gift of his state; of the fortune he had accumulated by his law practice and faithful attention to business; of the charitable deed he had done. Now, when death had claimed him in a foreign clime, he had willed all to his wife, and she, through the desire to befriend those who had known her husband and loved him, the unfortunate children in his native state should have a home

where Christianity and faithful adherence to duty, with a liberal education, would be given them only for the asking.

All day long, on every side, nothing but encomiums of praise was heard for the dead governor, and sympathetic words for his widow. No one would ever know more of the sad life of those two than was known now. Which had erred none should ever know. In this old town where Tom West was born and reared his faults were never to be blazoned to the world, but his good deeds would live forever. The magnificent structure that crowned the hill-top would be his monument. The old men and women would never grow tired of telling how Tom West made his way in the world.

After the ceremonies were over, Flora stood in the hall, receiving thanks and words of praise for what she had done, and hearty cooperation in the charitable work she had mapped out for her life's work. Her father and Dan Lane stood with her. Dan Lane was to have complete control of all funds. He was her agent, her ideas would be carried out by him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

As she was bidding the many old friends good-bye, with promises to come often to visit the home, she stood on the rear platform of the train. Dan Lane held her hand in parting a moment longer than necessary, saying, "Your father has promised to plead my cause."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE home on the hill for friendless children had prospered far beyond the most sanguine expectations. It is now ten years since that monument was placed upon the hill. There was not an inhabitant in the old town who ever grew tired of telling of the man who had been born and reared among them, and the young children could tell wonderful stories of this good man.

Judge Gray had gone to his reward in heaven eight years ago. Flora, left all alone in the world before she was thirty-five, thought her cup was bitter, but trouble had strengthened her. Taking up her life and trying to mend the broken threads, she looked about for something to do. At last she decided to go to Salem and live in the Russel Gray West Home. She loved children, and there among the little ones she would do the work her hands found to do.

Flora had been living here eight years. She

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

was happy and contented, the children loved her and the Salem people worshipped. Wherever she went hats were raised, women would smile, down in their hearts wondering why it all happened.

Dan Lane had long since learned that she was not to be more than his friend. They often counselled together for the good of the home. No gossip connected their names.

As the Christmas time drew near Flora planned a gala time for "her children," as the little waifs were called.

"Oh, what a grand time they shall have. I will make myself believe that they are all mine, and old Santa will come with a well-filled pack."

AN old man alighted from a late train Christmas eve in the little town of Salem. No one seemed to be waiting for him. The small depot was crowded with eager faces anxiously awaiting the arrival of some member of the family or Christmas visitor.

Tom West (for the old man was no other) looked about him. There was not one familiar face. Seating himself upon a truck used to load baggage, he watched the anxious faces, trying to find the trace of an old friend. Twenty years since he came in the early morning with Flora to see her on the train that would take her to her father, never to come back to him. "Oh for 'Aladdin's lamp' to say, Presto! change!" To see her standing there with her childish eyes and golden hair, to hear her voice asking, "Are you tired, dear?" To feel her arms around his neck. The "boy" would be almost a man. He

would no doubt be coming home from some eastern college to spend his holidays. Oh, what a home-coming it would have been! Hadn't he and Flora in their first year of married life built castles that resounded with the voices of happy boys and girls?

Sitting thus he watched the trains stop, heard the greetings and happy Christmas cheer until almost midnight. No use to go to the hotel; he could not sleep. Straightening himself up to his full height and taking a cigar from his pocket, he decided to walk through the old streets until morning.

Going out the main street of the town, he saw many improvements on every side. Electric signs, with familiar names, flashed their red, green and yellow lights before him. The residence part of the street was filled with handsome homes and well-kept lawns. He could see nothing that had marked the old town. Like Rip Van Winkle he was searching for those he had known.

In the distance, high on the hill, hundreds of lights twinkled. "I wonder what that building can be?"

Walking on until the grounds were

reached, he passed through the huge gates. The beautiful grounds were dotted here and there with swings. A merry-go-round was covered with an awning. The music from the big hall floated out to his ear. He drew nearer, seeing children romping around a large Christmas tree in the hall, lighted by hundreds of candles. The happy voices floated out to him.

"This must be some state institution. How long I have been away from this place!"

Tom West watched the Christmas tree, little dreaming that the "Santa Claus" all in white, with long beard and fat stomach, was Dan Lane; that his had been the unseen hand that made the unfortunate ones happy.

Going back as he came, his mind was busy with the past. The future was a blank. Coming to a small square with fountain and benches, he threw himself down to wait for morning. The night was cold, but he cared not; neither heat nor cold affected him.

A burly policeman came sauntering along. "Hello! my friend, you'd better move along. No lounging here! We cops have strict orders

to watch this town, as the crooks from Chicago seem to think this a choice spot to light."

Seeing that it was an old, white-headed man, well dressed, who had been accosted, he changed his tone, saying, "Stranger in these parts? Yes, I know our hotels are pretty full."

West began asking questions of the policeman.

"I have not been here for about twenty years, and I would like to get a little information about the old town and some of the people. Sit down here and tell me something of this place. I will look up my old friends early in the morning."

Seating himself and lighting the cigar West offered, the big cop was at once ready to be of use to the old gentleman.

"First I would like to know the name of this park and the fountain there?"

Giving a long puff at his cigar he answered, "This is West Park, given to the city by the wife and sister of Tom West, who was mayor of this town once, and then governor."

Tom West could hardly hide his agitation. "This very spot," the cop continued, "is

where Tom West was born. The old house was torn away many years ago."

In as steady a voice as he could command, Tom West asked, "The large building up there on the hill, with the beautiful grounds—what institution is that? This state is doing a great deal in the way of state buildings."

"That is the Russel Gray West Home for Children, given to this state by Mrs. Tom West, the wife of the same West for whom this park is named. The home is in memory of Tom West and his only child, Russel, who died when scarcely four years old."

The old gentleman had gotten up from the seat, and was pacing back and forth. "Tell me about this Tom West. I must have known him. How long has he been dead? Tell me all you know of him, his wife, his sister, everything, my friend. I am sure he is the same fellow I remember so well at college thirty years ago."

If there was anything that Salem people loved to dwell upon, it was the memory of Tom West, and what his wife had done since his death.

Beginning from the birth of the child, Tom, the man followed him through life until the day his wife returned to her city home. Not one word of condemnation did he hear, nothing but praise. Suddenly West interrupted the story, asking in an abrupt manner, "Why did his wife leave him? What had he done that she should return to her father?"

Laying the butt of the smokeless cigar carefully down, the policeman said in a low, gentle voice, "My friend, that was their secret. No one in this town will ever know what caused the trouble that broke two hearts. As sure as there is a God it was a mistake for both. When Mrs. West came back here to build that house, all who looked at the beautiful woman with her snowy hair could see written in lines of sorrow, 'My heart will never know joy or happiness, but I must do all that he would have done.' I tell you, man, no saint in heaven will wear a brighter crown than that little woman who lives there on the hill, teaching those poor unfortunate children how to live and giving them bread and education, so that when they are old

enough to go out into the world they will have an equal chance with the more fortunately born."

"Where did she get the money? Was this man West a rich man?"

"After his death a miner from South Africa brought two letters here, one for Judge Gray of New York, his father-in-law, the other for Dan Lane, an old friend. After everything was looked over it was discovered that Tom West was a very rich man. He had left all his money to his wife. She built 'The Home.' When her father died two years later, she came to make her home here. You can go to the house when you will, and you will always see the beautiful white-haired woman surrounded by the children. She tells them beautiful stories, and plants good seed in their little minds. When a boy or girl leaves the Russel Gray West Home there is no evil in their hearts. Both mind and body have been nourished.

The sun was beginning to show a rosy hue in the east. The cop arose and giving his belt a twist and tilting his hat back, said, "Well stranger, I hope I will see you again, and I

am sure you will find many things to interest you here. If I can do anything toward helping you find any of your old friends, call on me, Jake Green, No. 61."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

To M WEST stalked into the lobby of the Salem, the largest hotel in the town. Going to the desk, the clerk pushed the register to him, and in a bold hand he wrote, "W. Thomas, South Africa." Handing his checks, he asked that his baggage be sent for at once. It was the breakfast hour. He watched the crowd. How strange that after twenty years he could stand here and no one knew him!

A group of four or five men stood talking a few feet from him. Two he recognized at once. A little more grey and inclined to be stout, yet he knew Dan Lane and Dan Potts. Surveying himself in the glass, he knew why he was unrecognizable. Tall, stooped, with thin grey hair, his skin yellow and seared with wrinkles, instead of tipping the scales at two twenty-five pounds, he would scarcely weigh one hundred and twenty-five.

"I will have my breakfast first, then seek

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Dan and tell him the dead has come to life. Oh, Flora! Will you forget the past and with me take up the broken threads and wind to the end? Together we may find peace."

A hearty breakfast at a table near the centre of the room, where he could see the men, young and old, hurrying to be through with their meal, eager to be out in the street to pass good cheer. More than one person noticed the tall, stooped man as he slowly left the café.

Seating himself at a writing desk, he called for a copy of the city directory.

"Yes, here it is! Dan Lane, Lane building, third floor front, 'phone 2418. I will call over the 'phone first, so that I may be sure to see him."

As Tom walked across the lobby to the 'phone booth, he came face to face with the Rev. Black, now old and using a cane to lean upon in his visits from one home to another. Stopping suddenly, Mr. Black dropped his cane. Extending both hands, with his face like death, he exclaimed, "I know it can be no other! The lost is found! I never have felt you were dead. I knew you

were not, after hearing the confession of a dying man nearly six months ago." Taking him by the arm, he led West to a nearby seat, where for more than an hour these two told of the past. Tom freely confessed to his old rector his part in the tragedy of two lives. Mr. Black told him how his wife had come to them and here, day after day, spent her life doing good in his name; that there was not one in the community but honoured his name.

As the old man related so much of interest, Tom spoke in his lowest tones:

"Mr. Black, I want my wife to take me back in her heart. What can I do?"

"Tom, you have never been out of her heart. Even in her deepest sorrow it was her love for you that drove her to the step. It was all a dreadful mistake. Go to her this day, this hour. Seek her ere another can tell her you still live. Let this be the gladdest Christmas that you have ever known."

"Oh, if I dared! I fear so to go to Flora! She may not forgive. She may turn from me."

Placing his feeble hand upon that of his friend, Mr. Black said, "The subject of my

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

sermon last Sunday was 'Love Divine.' Today it is 'Peace on Earth.' Go to her with this in your heart. I feel that the sun to-day will set on two united souls, who will spend the rest of their lives in peace, which is the natural inheritance of all God's creatures. Go, my friend, with my blessing."

Leaving Tom sitting as in a dream, the good man, who had shared the sorrows of his flock here for more than thirty years, passed on among the crowd to wish one and another

a happy Christmas.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

IN the small waiting-room off the hall, Flora was summoned by the man-servant to see a gentleman who would not send in his name. Some one who needs help this Christmas day no doubt. As she passed from her room down the long corridor, many were the merry Christmas greetings she heard. The children trooped about her, all with a smile of love. She was never too busy to give them a word. Seeing her special pet, Benny, a little crippled boy of three, she picked him up in her arms. Going to the room where she could see an old gentleman waiting, as she reached the door she put the little fellow in the arms of the nurse, who followed close behind. Turning from Benny, she stopped, then gave a little cry: "Tom, Tom!"

When she came back to consciousness there were several attendants about, but her eyes roved around the room until she found the object sought for. All knew the story now,

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

for in his fear of what the shock had done Tom West poured out the truth.

"Come near," she whispered. "I am better now. I have felt all the time you must come back, so I came here that you would find me, trying to mend the past as best I might."

They were left alone to tell their own story. When evening came, Tom West and his wife sat among the children, who crowded around them to show their love.

"No greater love has any man," Tom West said, as he folded his wife to his breast.

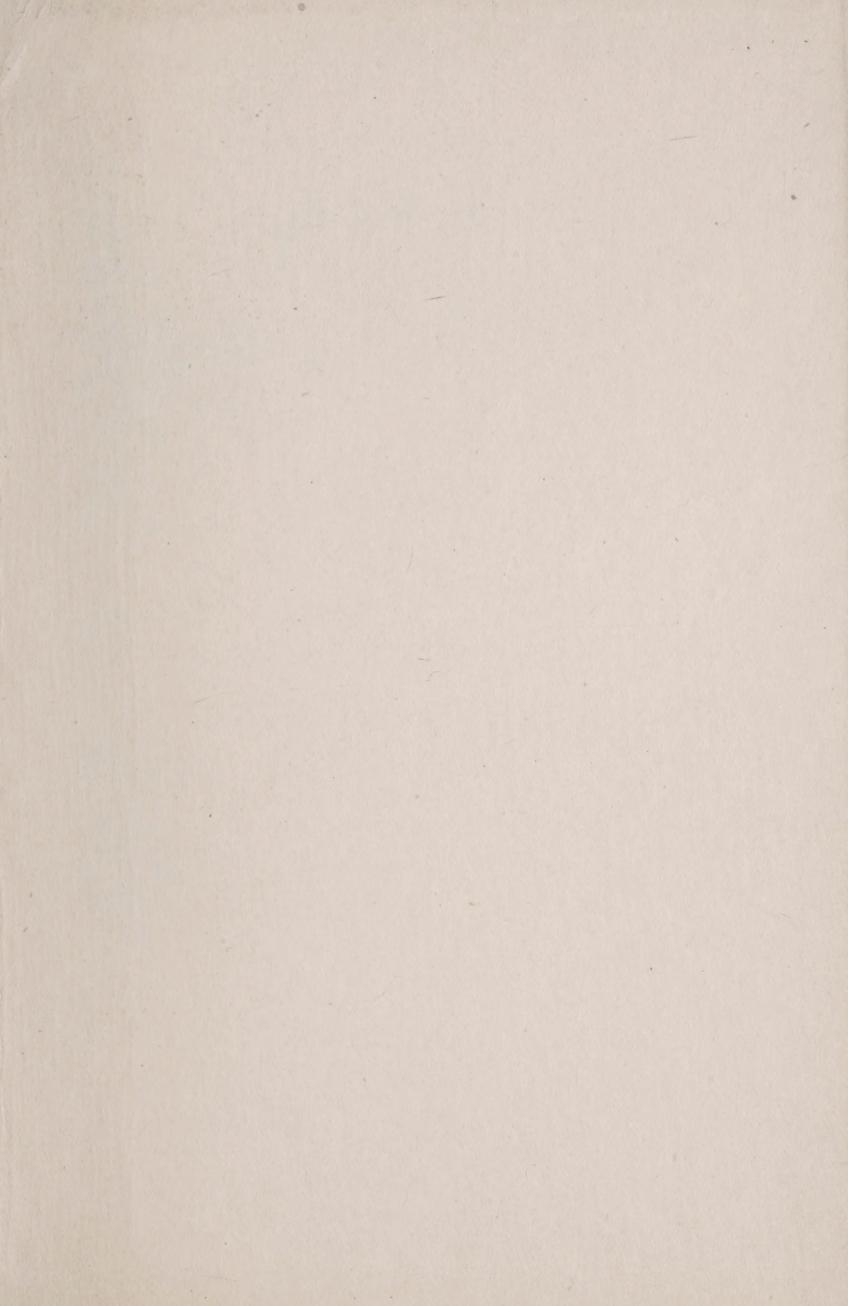
THE END











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